

# **The Local Church on a Mission for God**

**Essays and Speeches on  
Global Disciple-Making**

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I appreciate Dr. Evertt Huffard's writing the Foreword. He was first my student, then my colleague in church work and academia, and always a friend.

## Foreword

Two experiences within the same month blessed me with pure joy. The first was a men's retreat with more than a 120 church leaders and preachers from several nations in southern Africa. There were no missionaries at the retreat. These brothers reflected the harvest of churches that sent missionaries many decades ago. About a third of the men were second generation believers who knew a missionary or were aware of missionaries who had helped plant their churches. Most of the men represented the spontaneous expansion of the kingdom that brought men to life in Christ and to lead God's people. Their Bibles showed signs of a lot of study. Their stories told of spiritual battles and victory in Christ. The network of relationships reflected a love for the churches in the area. Their faithfulness in ministry with very limited resources suggested deep spiritual maturity. It was a joy to see what the Gospel can do in 50 years.

The second experience involved a visit to a U.S. city on the east coast with the chairman of the missions committee of a church that has planted over 50 churches in 65 years. In this city, they helped plant three churches. Most of the members in one of these churches were refugees from Africa. Some had been exposed to the Gospel in their homeland before the war broke out, so they were searching for the church when they arrived. A mission-minded church helped them get started and the gospel continued to spread within the community. Fifteen years later we find ourselves meeting with the elders of this church, talking about our partnership in sending their preacher as a missionary to Africa, their ministry within their community, and the emergence of leaders in that church. These conversations brought pure joy. Churches that are not involved in kingdom growth miss out on the joys of the kingdom.

Over the past 25 years I have had opportunity to assist many church leaders in assessing the health of their churches. The most consistent challenge seems to be the inability to define a clear mission for the church—a mission so compelling that leaders set priorities by it, most of the members participate in it and they all share a common heart for unity and generosity. The age of the church should have negligible impact on the vitality of its mission

because the Word and the Gospel are timeless. If aging people can think and act young, aging churches can think mission and plant churches. They may need help. This collection of articles by Dr. Slate will be a valuable tool in discovering best practices in missions and reclaiming a rationale for mission that will bring joy.

I have known Dr. Slate for more than 45 years and know his passion for the vital role of the church in God's mission. Several years ago, when I was reading Christopher Wright's book, *The Mission of God's People* (2010), I came across a statement that reminded me of Dr. Slate. Wright articulated the vision of this book when he wrote that "it is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission—God's mission" (p. 24).

It will be my prayer that every reader of this book will become more effectively involved in God's mission and experience the joys of the kingdom.

Evertt W. Huffard  
August 28, 2017

## **Introduction**

Over four decades ago I reached a conclusion that has affected a significant part of my ministry in global evangelism. I came to realize that although churches of Christ have many strengths and many helps (books, training facilities, funding), the weakest link in their global endeavors is the local church itself. That is to say, given the church-sponsored approach to what is commonly called “missions,” all of the responsibility for process falls to the local church. After much reading, conversing, and observing, it seemed clear enough that the majority of local churches did not understand the process. That led me to focus many of my efforts on congregational training.

For many years I have tried to share with my brotherhood information designed to create understanding of and meaningful participation in global evangelizing, transmitting the Christian faith, so that people will become and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Those training efforts have taken the forms of workshops for church leaders, presenting speeches and sermons, distributing printed materials, and writing both motivational and educational articles. No one has read all of those articles since they have appeared in no less than nine periodicals and as sections of books. Some of the speeches have never been published. This present volume consists of edited versions of select materials that have been written or presented over a period of forty years and more.

These items in this collection have appeared mostly, but not exclusively, in religious periodicals. Two items were originally speeches and one a training class in a regional workshop. Slight changes have been made in several of the articles for a variety of reasons (new books, new situations, etc.), but the thrust of each article remains true to the original. In many of the articles an offer was made to send a useful book list or other information on the subject of the article. It was judged unnecessary, however, to include articles in this collection on matters like forming a “missions committee” (missions/evangelism resource group in a local church) and writing a “missions policy statement” since much information on those subjects is available now that was lacking four or five decades ago.

The essays/speeches are arranged in three divisions: **Biblical Concerns** (we are a biblically-driven people), **Methodology and Techniques** (many works fail or succeed more from ministry decisions than from beliefs), and **Culture** (most needed evangelizing involves crossing culture lines)—all at a practical level. Evangelizing cross-culturally is a different experience from working within one's home culture.

Churches of Christ follow a church-sponsored approach to global evangelizing rather than employing a missionary society as the sending and managing agent. Several other churches do the same. We have opted for this approach on theological grounds since the task of evangelizing is a *church* responsibility not to be passed off to something else. The church is on a mission for God in the world. Evangelizing, locally or abroad, can no more be turned over to a non-church entity than can benevolence and edification. It has been a dispute in our brotherhood as to how much the church may use the services of para-church entities (Bible translators, broadcaster, printers, trainers, and so forth), or even secular organizations, to assist in its work; but it has never been granted that the church can farm out its work to non-churches. At a practical level, missionary societies have made some of the biggest blunders ever made in the global missions enterprise! See, for examples, Rolland Allen's criticisms in *The Spontaneous Expansion of Christianity, and the Causes that Hinder it*. The crucial matter is to function with biblical values and to be informed about the processes. Both ignorant societies and ignorant congregations can make God-dishonoring mistakes. Thus, all elements that are involved in the process of selecting the field of work, choosing workers, providing adequate finances, giving emotional and spiritual support for those workers, engaging in appropriate evaluations, and eventually exiting the work in a constructive manner—all these responsibilities fall to a local church that takes on a significant task of transmitting the faith in new territory.

The local church, identified by some as "the gathered church," is a very significant biblical concept to churches of Christ. That expression of believers is the decision-making entity regarding ministry. For that reason I have spent time and effort to raise the level of understanding within local churches. In stressing the place of the local church in evangelizing, however, there is no intention to

downplay the major contributions *individuals* have made in evangelizing as they moved from place to place because of their occupations, persecutions, or the simple desire to migrate to new areas. These people are often referred to as “tentmakers” (see Acts 18:1-4), self-supported believers who have a strong enough faith to talk about it to others. A full-scale book can be written about the contributions “tentmaking” members of churches of Christ have made to global evangelizing. Even when individuals are the cutting edge of evangelizing in new territory, however, they need the emotional, spiritual, and tactical support of a body of Christians. Though he was an apostle, Paul valued greatly the support given to him by the church at Philippi (Phil. 1:3-5; 4:10-18) and “other churches” (2 Cor. 11:8). He asked believers less mature than he to pray for him in his work (Eph. 6:19). When churches simply give money to another institution to do its work the local members rarely feel involved in the work, whereas when a church sends out workers, communicates with and prays for them regularly, they are able to achieve the status of “partners,” as the Philippians did with Paul (Phil. 1:5; 4:15; 3 John 8). Over many years I have interacted with Protestant missionaries and seen them virtually salivate when I describe good church-missionary relationships, like the one I enjoyed with my own supporting church. One man told me, “I have no idea who is supporting me. The only person I have contact with is the Field Secretary” [of his Society].

These articles/essays have behind them hundreds of potential references. In other words, I have tried to take scholarly biblical studies on these subjects, insights from the history of evangelizing, and hints from the social sciences, and then restate them at a level where most church leaders and potential missionaries can understand and apply them. Because some of the ideas I present are disputable I have used sufficient footnotes to indicate I am not simply foisting on others my opinions and biases. No one missionary’s experience is a valid basis for generalizing for those who work in different circumstances. There is no good reason in this collection, however, to display complicated cultural-social anthropological and sociological theories. Rather, it seems best to provide understandable digests of insights drawn from scholarly studies. Thus, with the exception of one or two selections I have not included in this collection longer, heavily documented articles. It is

hoped that they can be put into another volume of semi-scholar articles.

It is my fond hope that by putting this material in book form it will continue to inform and encourage both individuals and churches to engage in meaningful and God-honoring disciple-making, which is what Jesus said to do. At least, the collection will represent a little of what one man sought to do for the church over four decades, a church that is to be on a mission for God in the world.

C. Philip Slate

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## Chapter 1

# Don't Begin with the Great Commission!

(Condensed from “What the Bible Teaches About World Evangelism,” in *What the Bible Teaches*. 1972 Bible Lectures at Harding Graduate School of Religion [Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1972]: 161-78)

When David Filbeck was working in Thailand a Buddhist asked him, “Who was born first, Buddha or Jesus?” Gautama Buddha was born in 563 B. C. when the Jews were in Babylonian exile. Filbeck knew, of course, that the gospel has deep roots in the Old Testament, so he asked the Buddhist, “Who was born first, Abraham or Buddha?” His retort was appropriate, but the conversation made him realize that beginning with “Jesus” is a rather advanced point in a continuous narrative. Filbeck learned that to make sense to Buddhists he had to begin much earlier than “Jesus” in the biblical story. Something like that happens when we *begin* at Matt. 28:16-20 and move forward from that point in our thinking about God’s worldwide intentions.

Often statements about the biblical basis for evangelizing worldwide are very brief, focusing on two or three verses from Matt. 28, Mk. 16 or Lk. 24 that record Jesus’ post-resurrection charge to the apostles. As pivotally important as these texts are, however, I wish to contend that beginning with the “great commission,” without moving backward before moving forward, is insufficient to explain adequately and feel the force of what is involved in the task Jesus ordered.

### ***A Hinge, Neither a Beginning nor an Ending***

In many respects Matt. 28:16-20 and its parallels point backward as well as forward and thus serve as a hinge that connects the expectations and ministry of Jesus with the entire biblical storyline. Matthew begins his gospel by relating Jesus to both Abraham and David (1:1) and sustains those backward connections throughout.<sup>1</sup> The last paragraph in Matthew is similarly

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 2:6, 15, 18; 3:3-4; 4:14-16; 8:17; 9:13; etc.

pregnant with references to Old Testament concepts and promises, and its potency is significantly reduced when those connections are ignored.

Jesus' directive to make people "disciples" was not new since Moses, John the Baptist, and the Pharisees all had disciples.<sup>2</sup> Teaching and learning were prominent features of the law.<sup>3</sup> The staggeringly new aspect of Jesus' directive, however, was that disciple-making was to be done in "all the nations." Of course this stands in bold contrast to what is often called the "limited" or "lesser" commission of Jesus where he sent his disciples to teach only "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5-6). The reference to "all the nations" in chapter 28, however, is much more than a contrast to chapter 10. Its universalism goes back at least to "the promise" to Abraham.<sup>4</sup> Paul was referring to that promise when he declared that "the scripture . . . preached the gofspel beforehand to Abraham" (Gal. 3:9).

The words, "all the nations" (Gr., *panta ta ethnee*), are identical with the verbiage in the Greek Old Testament at Gen. 18:18, but the same thought is recorded in the numerous accounts of the promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham's offspring were told they would be a blessing to "all the families of the earth", to "all nations."<sup>5</sup> Though God desired to be glorified through His faithful people in "the land of promise" (Isa. 60:21; 61:3), the promise to the Patriarchs involved a much larger piece of real estate than Canaan. Much more was involved than greater vistas of geography.

Throughout the Old Testament, even after Gen. 11, God indicated both His concern for the non-Israelites, "the nations," and His plan to use His "kingdom of priests" to extend His love and concern to them.<sup>6</sup> The Psalms repeatedly mention the time when "the nations" would come before the Lord and worship Him or know

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<sup>2</sup> Jno. 9:28; Mk. 2:18; Jno. 11:7; Lk. 5:33. A disciples is a "learner," hence a follower.

<sup>3</sup> Deut. 4:9; 6:6-8; 11:19. Priests as well as prophets were to teach (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 33:10; 2 Ki. 12:2; 2 Chron. 15:3; Mal. 2:7; etc.).

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 12:1-4; 18:18; 22:17-18; 25:4-5; 28:13-14.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 12:3; 28:14 with 18:18; 22:18; 26:4.

<sup>6</sup> Ex. 19:6; Cf. Isa. 61:6; 66:19-21.

and respect Him.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Ps. 67 has been called the “missionary Psalm” because of its emphasis on “the nations,” the Gentiles. Only when we know something of this prominent strand of thought, of God’s enduring promise to Abraham, do we feel the heaviness of Jesus’ words, “all the nations.” This emphasis began in the heart of God. Among other things, Jesus’ statement was a way of saying, “the long expected era of the Messiah is here!” Attempts to reach the nations of the world today, as in the first century of the Christian era, are a participation in God’s faithfulness to His promise to Abraham. Just as he used the Jews to serve his purposes, so now he intends to use his new covenant people.<sup>8</sup> Kaiser argued convincingly that the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham is the organizing principle of the Old Testament and that its fulfillment is found in the work of Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

Both Matthew and Luke elaborate on the fulfillment aspect of Jesus’ life and work. The opening words of Matthew refer to Jesus as the offspring of Abraham and David (1:1), and Luke (1:60-79) refers to the coming of the one who was promised through both Abraham and David. The old man Simeon, holding the infant Jesus in the temple, said by the Spirit, “my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (Lk. 2:30-32). Isaiah had used the terminology of Israel’s being “a light to the nations” (Gentiles) (42:6; 49:6). The promise to Abraham and other texts related to God’s desire for “the nations” constitute a kind of veiled “great commission” in the Old Testament, even though God did not make clear how He intended to bless the nations through the Jews. The apostolic word was that the promise to bless all nations began its fulfillment in the time and work of Jesus and his apostles (Lk. 2:32 and Acts 13:47).

One reason Paul routinely went first to the synagogues when he came to a new city was to bring the Jews to the Messiah since they were to be the initial mediators of that “light” to the

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<sup>7</sup> Ps. 22:27; 45:17; 47:1ff; 102:15; 117:1.

<sup>8</sup> For an extended study of this subject see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A biblical theology of mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward a Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1991).

Gentiles. It was important for him to point out that “many thousands” of the Jews had become believers (Acts 21:20) as part of Israel’s role in reaching the Gentiles.<sup>10</sup>

In several New Testament books one reads of the Jew-Gentile problem because some Jews found it difficult to grant that Gentiles could be fully accepted without keeping the Jewish law (Acts 15:1-2; Gal. 2:11-21). Paul argued powerfully against this notion in Galatians 3:26-4:7. The important meeting in Jerusalem of Acts 15 was designed to resolve the Jew-Gentile issue, at least in Antioch. When James spoke at that meeting, he referred to Peter’s account of how “God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name” (v. 14). Then he affirmed that it was in accord with what the prophets had written (v. 15), citing in vs. 16-18 statements from Amos 9:11-12, Jer. 12:15 and Isa. 45:21 that refer to the Gentiles’ being called by God’s name. He connects the events recorded in the early chapters of Acts with God’s messages through the prophets. Paul routinely saw the conversion of the Gentiles as their “partaking of the promises” (Gal. 3:23-29; Eph. 3:3-6). In his sermon before Agrippa Paul said that he was on trial “for the hope in the promise made by God to our fathers” (Acts 26:6-7).

Paul evidently functioned with a consciousness that he was being used by God to fulfill his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He went on to tell Agrippa that Jesus came to “proclaim light to the people (Jews) and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23). At the end of Acts (28:29) Paul states, “God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles.” Many other such references are recorded in the Luke-Acts materials. This line of thought demonstrates that Matt. 28:16-20, going to ‘all the nations,’ is as much *continuity* as *beginning*.

### ***To The Ends of the Earth***

While the Old Testament period deals mostly with the Jews who lived no more than a good day’s drive from Jerusalem in the modern Middle East, the Messianic era is different. A big part of God’s blessing the Gentiles is that these blessings are to go “to the ends of the earth.” In other words, as surely as there are human beings anywhere in the world, just that surely God wants them to

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<sup>10</sup> On this point see Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972):41-74.

come to know Him. Just as God initially planned to use His ancient covenant people to do that job, so now He uses his Jew-Gentile new covenant people—his chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, his own people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. Gal. 6:16), his church—to carry out the task. As surely as Christians take seriously the story line of the entirety of Scripture just that surely they will take seriously the universal proclamation of Jesus Christ as a “working with God.”<sup>11</sup> Wright has produced a full and delightful treatment of this theme.<sup>12</sup>

The big point to note is that by beginning at the “great commission” and moving forward in our thought about worldwide evangelism one fails to see the sustained emphasis throughout the Old Testament on the coming era when the Gentiles would be brought in. People who evangelize today are participating in God’s faithfulness to his promises. Going from the great commission forward in the New Testament is like reading only the second half of a two-act play, like reading only the second half of a book. The conclusions reached in such readings, even if clear, lose some of their power, thrill, and perspective without the contribution of the first part.

Irenaeus was an important late second century figure who worked and wrote from what is today Lyon, France shortly after a severe persecution of Christians. Though he knew of Jesus’ directive about “all the nations” he had an additional perspective. At one point he expressed some delight in being used by God to bring about the destiny of Japheth (Europeans) to “dwell in the tents of Shem”, a reference to Gen. 9:27. Christians today are not merely obeying a directive of Jesus in evangelizing; they are being used by God to fulfill His ancient promises. That is no insignificant perspective!

Ancient Israel largely failed in her task. With some exceptions along the way, Israel obscured her light by idolatry, arrogance, and covenant breaking in general. As God’s Messianic Israel, the church may do the same thing! It must grieve God that too many of his churches today turn in on themselves, either in self-

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<sup>11</sup> Acts 14:27; 15:4; 21:19; 2 Cor. 6:1; etc.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).

pampering or disputation, rather than proclaiming by word and work the Light of the world! In reassessing our part in this divine scheme of things, it is advisable to begin much earlier than the great commission in our thinking about evangelizing the lost.

## Chapter 2

# WHAT IS ENTAILED IN GLOBAL EVANGELIZING/DISCIPLE-MAKING?

(Slightly edited version of the article published in *Guyana Newsletter* [August-September 2003]. Georgetown: Guyana, International Bible Institute.)

If we do not understand what God wants done in his world, how can we please him? That applies to evangelizing/missions/disciple-making as well as any other Christian endeavor. Any effort at making disciples should function within a biblical understanding of that activity. So, what is it?

William Abraham performed a useful service in pointing out that simple terms like “witness,” “church growth,” “spreading good news,” “personal evangelism” and the like are incomplete ways of looking at what God has in mind for his people to be and do.<sup>13</sup> Often in the New Testament, a single word may stand for the whole process of responding to Jesus without giving the details of that process. So, it is said of people who began to follow Jesus that they “believed,” or “repented unto life,” or “turned to the Lord,” or “were baptized.” No one of those expressions describes all they did to begin following Jesus. One word stood for the whole process, a usage in English grammar called *synecdoche*. Similarly, one reads of preaching “repentance and remission of sins” (Lk. 24:47), “the word” (Acts 8:4), “good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:2), “the good news of Jesus” (Acts 8:35), and the “kingdom of God” (Acts 28:23). The list is long.

It is obvious, however, that when Paul and company “evangelized” or made disciples (Acts 14:21) in a place, they routinely left behind an assembly of believers, a church, not a mere collection of isolated converts. It was never God’s intention that isolated individuals begin to follow Jesus and then do their best to “be faithful” all alone. Faithfulness involved life together with other Christians in what we may call congregations, assemblies, or local

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<sup>13</sup> William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989).

churches. The saved were the church and the church was the saved in each location. Those who preached the good news of Jesus and formed believers into local churches endeavored to strengthen and stabilize those groups. Paul made it clear that those who became disciples were to function in a body in such a way that they “grow up in every way into him who is the head, in Christ” (Eph. 4:11-16). What Paul urged in that text is what one observes in reading Acts and the Epistles. It can be argued that each of the twenty-seven documents that make up the New Testament has for at least one of its purposes that of stabilizing and strengthening individuals or churches. In other words, the apostles of Jesus did not bring people to faith and initial obedience only to leave them to their own resources.

### ***Three Principles of Evangelizing/Disciple-Making***

There are several ways of describing the evangelistic or disciple-making endeavors in the New Testament. Some focus on the initial efforts to bring people into the kingdom of God, while others make lists of the components. For several decades I have argued the usefulness of thinking in terms of three minimal principles that should govern the church’s intentional efforts to bring unbelievers to the point of living an obedient, joyful, productive life before God.

**1. Universalize the Message.** This point is granted so broadly that I need not elaborate on it over much. That is part of the thrust of Chapter 1. Suffice it to say that God who made the world desires to be known by His creatures. Throughout the Old Testament, beginning at least in Gen. 12:1-4, God expressed His concern for “the nations,” that is, the non-Jews. The Jews were to be “a light to the nations” (Isa. 42:6; 49:6), and it was projected that the nations would come to their light (Isa. 60:3). Paul used Isa. 49:6 in his sermon in Antioch of Pisidia to refer to his work among the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-7). Faithful Christians and churches should strive to get the gospel to everyone in every unit of people—“every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 4:9). Although easily stated, it is a formidable task; but Jesus-followers should ache to see the “knowledge of the glory of the Lord” fill the earth “as the waters cover the sea” (Heb. 2:14).



It is one thing to get a visa to enter and work in another country. That is a political requirement. It is another thing to consider the social groupings of people within those countries, just as the early church acknowledged categories of Jew and Greek. There were even divisions among the Jews, as with Grecians and Hebrews, that at times expressed itself in ugly prejudice (Acts 6:1ff). In Japan, for example, with one exception (the Ainu of Hokkaido region), the population is of one ethnic stock. On the other hand, in Kenya, East Africa, there are about forty tribes that hold together as units. Universalizing the message involves reaching every tribe in a country with a meaningful message. In many complex societies, like the USA and several Western European countries, ethnic groups often tend to congregate and interact primarily with each other. Responsible evangelizing will include those groups, and initial evangelizing may entail planting churches within language and ethnic groups. Unity across cultural and language lines can be taught later, as with the Indian caste system.<sup>14</sup> The good news of Jesus Christ is for everyone. Jesus instructed, "all the nations."

**2. Strive to facilitate valid decision.** Only those who "believe in their hearts" (Rom. 10:10) and are "obedient from the heart" (Rom. 6:17) to make the radical decision to turn from one way of life to God's way (repentance) can validly come to the Savior. Jesus himself stressed the importance of "counting the cost" before taking steps to follow him (Matt. 18:18-22; Lk. 9:57-62). If becoming a disciple of Jesus were easy, involving no demands, there would be little or no cost to be counted. But that was not the case.

A. D. Nock, the Harvard specialist in Greco-Roman religions, pointed out that in the first and second centuries "the change of attitude which the Christian missionary had to effect was immense" for several reasons.<sup>15</sup> The pagan conceptions of religion were different. One could embrace several religions at the same time and the idea of belonging body and soul to a god was not present. The exclusivity of Christianity and its demands for specific ethical behavior were strange entities. Nothing less than full

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<sup>14</sup> Donald A. McGavran, *Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from India* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979).

<sup>15</sup> A. D. Nock, *Early Gentile Christianity and Its Hellenistic Background*. "Harper Torchbooks" (New York: Harper & Row, 1964):23ff.

attachment to Jesus was acceptable to the Christian teachers, even though people had to begin that process as spiritual infants. There was a cost to be counted; over time a radical reshaping was to take place.

The evangelists/teachers were to produce clear communication about God, sin, Jesus, repentance, salvation, faithfulness, judgment, and so forth, as demanding but not impossible. Modern efforts to do the same have not always been successful. In the nineteenth century, Asians who identified on the surface as Christians with the hope that they would get some physical benefits were called “rice Christians.” In various places alternative words may be substituted for “rice” and the effect is the same: “education,” “go to America” (or Europe), “medical care,” “financial support,” and “material help.” Short-term evangelistic campaigns, as often conducted, are particularly prone to gather “rice Christians.”

In the nature of the case, the decision to follow Jesus is a radical one. The biblical teaching about conversion (turning) to Christ is strong. It involves repentance, changing one's mind about the course of life to which she or he will be committed. Paul described the Thessalonians as having “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). “Turn” and “serve” marked the beginning of a new way of life, a new, exclusive allegiance. Nothing but a clear and compelling presentation of Jesus as Lord and Savior, the Giver of new life, can elicit such repentance and trust.

Everywhere in the world, however, it is imperative that preachers/teachers strive diligently to facilitate valid decisions, whether those decisions are “yes” or “no.” Like Jesus and his apostles, we will not see everyone we teach come to faith and obedience; but we can strive to communicate as clearly as possible a good news message in each culture.

**3. *Work diligently to produce persistence of faith in new converts.*** Likely, most preachers/teachers falter at this point, at home and abroad, especially in a day when workers want quick results so they can move on to other areas. As noted, all writers of New Testament books have for at least one of their purposes that of strengthening, protecting, or encouraging Christians to survive

and grow. In some cases they were being fortified against false and dangerous teachings or tendencies (Colossians, Galatians, 1 John), while in others they were being given perspective on their persecution and suffering (Hebrews, 1 Peter, Revelation). At times their questions were being answered so they could live more informed and ordered lives (1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians). Paul visited several new churches, “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith” (Acts 14:21-22). It was not enough for those who were scattered after the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19-21) merely to start or plant the church in Antioch of Syria. The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch, and he urged them to “remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose” (v. 23). Soon, Barnabas brought Paul from Tarsus (11:22-25) and those two delightful servants spent an entire year teaching the church (vs. 25-6). They knew that Jesus was not looking for only three-month disciples.

When new converts do not survive it is common for their teachers to rationalize by saying, “Well, they were not really converted in the first place.” When that is the case, however, whose fault was it? Did the teachers have anything to do with that? See point # 2 above. Second, the conversion may have been valid and sincere, with the subsequent falling away being the fault of those who should have been stabilizing them, strengthening them in the Lord. Often, especially among those who know very little about the way of the Lord, new converts may know very well why they became Christians, but they may know very little about how to remain faithful and what it means to grow to maturity. They may not know basic matters like daily prayer, reading Scripture (if they are literate), feeding spiritually at the Lord’s table, and encouraging and being encouraged with fellow Christians. New converts desperately need post-conversion help. They are babies. The second century church learned that and began rather rigorous pre-baptismal instruction, called “catechism,” from the Greek word that means “instruction.” A sufficient amount of pre- and post-conversion instruction is needed, always geared to the context in which the new converts live.

Elders/shepherds of churches that send or support preachers should not be chiefly interested in knowing how many baptisms occurred on this or that campaign, or even this or that

month. A more realistic question is, "After three years or so, how are those people getting along who were baptized in that campaign?" Someone has observed that some people "deny the doctrine of 'once saved, always saved,' and then practice it most faithfully!" Leaving new converts to themselves, failing to provide appropriate follow-up, is about like carefully leading a two-year-old child to the middle of a busy boulevard and then leaving it alone. Mentally put yourself in the position of a new convert and then ask, "What would I want someone to do for me in the weeks and months following my baptism?" Another appropriate question is, "What do I regret that no one did for me as a new Christian?"

Christian leaders approach this reinforcement task differently. A fine church in Campo Grande, Brazil constructed thirteen locally developed lessons through which every new convert was carefully taken. Our brothers in Central America composed a helpful document, *Tus Primeros Cuarenta Días* (Your First Forty Days), to be used by every new convert in addition to his or her activities in the local church. Other churches provide a careful mentoring process by which two or three stronger Christians work with a new Christian, while even others have "Foundations of Faith" classes. Some use videos or DVDs on the general theme, "Now That I Am A Christian." These are proactive ways of strengthening new Christians, providing for them much of what they do not know they need. Responsible evangelizers, as well as those who support them and hold them accountable, should put in place some concrete means of strengthening individual Christians and developing churches in specific contexts (Eph. 4:11-16). If that is not the case, then to that extent disciple-makers are falling short of what the New Testament writers describe as their task in a world of lost people. Giving appropriate attention to all three of these minimal principles tends to conserve a higher percent of new converts, assists them in spiritual development, and the maturing of churches.

## Chapter 3

# FRUIT THAT INCREASES TO THE CREDIT OF THE SUPPORTING CHURCH

(Slightly edited version of an article published in *Gospel Advocate* 129:19  
[1 Oct. 1987]:586-587.)

The elder with whom I was talking was a friend of many years. We stood in the shell of what was to be a large auditorium for a congregation that had decided to build its new structure in the area where the members had moved over a period of several years. The steel girders stretched up imposingly, well above the incomplete brickwork.

I was somewhat overawed at the size of the structure because I had just returned from 10 years of evangelistic work in Britain. Most of the church buildings there were small enough to fit comfortably into that steel framework. I was somewhat ill at ease, but I had learned to be careful about passing judgment on people concerning matters of opinion. What has lingered with me since that day, now over forty years ago, is not so much what I thought as what the elder said.

"Philip, I hope we have done the right thing in building this," he said. "You know, for many, many years this church has used over half of its contributions on missions and evangelism outside of Tennessee. But to build this, however," tilting his head back to look at the tall girders, "we've had to cut back on our mission work, and it's done something to our spirit."

I have pondered my friend's observation. "It's done something to our spirit." Frequently, preachers, elders and others feel the building of a new structure will boost the spirit, create enthusiasm, and cause the church to grow. But for some reason, that had not happened there, nor had I any evidence that the elders expected it to do so. Neither had they expected it to weaken the spirit of the church!

I do not know that anyone polled the church in an effort to discover the causes of the malaise, but my friend felt it was because they were no longer giving as much to world evangelization, hearing those reports about how God was working through them, and at times visiting the workers and looking at their efforts. Circumstantial evidence proves that he was correct regarding that church, but statistician Kirk Hadaway learned through research that often, but not always, building a new building will inhibit church growth.<sup>16</sup>

The story of the two postures of that church may be a parable about the effects on the home/supporting church when it does much, little, or no worldwide evangelization. The case may be the same with doing or supporting works of compassion. Many of us have seen cases where Christians give money elsewhere because the leadership of their home church provided no opportunities for the congregation to help evangelize in needy areas. Those members wanted to do what God clearly requires His people to do. On the other hand, in some cases people have given sacrificially, and even have borrowed money to support worldwide evangelization. Churches experience disappointment and a decrease of satisfaction once they experience the joy of worldwide evangelizing and then reduce it without good reason. Here the focus is on the fruit that abounds (Philippians 4:14-20) in the churches that evangelize the way God wants it to, both financially and spiritually. Although world-wide evangelization should be done *primarily to glorify God* (Ephesians 1:6,12,14), by increasing the number of people who praise God (2 Corinthians 4:14,15) and secondarily to see people delivered from darkness (Colossians 1:13), several delightful results often occur in the local church when that work is done. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," said Jesus (Acts 20:35).

**Joy** is one such result. Repeatedly, I have seen joy among people in congregations that are deeply involved in evangelizing, especially when they hear of tangible results of that work. In one case a man entered the pulpit in March of that year and reported, "Since the beginning of the year, 22 Indians have left paganism and become Christians." Hearing the results of the preaching efforts

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<sup>16</sup> C. Kirk Hadaway, *Church Growth Principles: Separating Fact from Fiction* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1991): 131-32.

they supported, the congregation silently rejoiced. The evidence was written on their faces. That is how the early church responded to news of conversions (cf. Acts 11:18; 14:27).

**Modeling** is another result in the local church. In the 1940s and '50s, when men returned from mission areas to report to the Old Hickory, Tennessee church,<sup>17</sup> a young Philip Morrison heard them. "Those men were my heroes," he told me. That story can be told hundreds of times. One study among churches of Christ revealed that among fourteen motivational factors, a gospel preacher and a missionary ranked second and third (behind the Christian college atmosphere) as chief factors in the decision to become a missionary.<sup>18</sup>

Annie May Lewis used to tell of an incident in Searcy, Arkansas in the late 1950s when Dow and Pearl Merritt returned for a year's furlough after 30 years of work in Zambia, Africa. The church used a Sunday evening meeting to rejoice over their work, thank God for the results, and express appreciation to the Merritts. That night, after returning home a little girl said to her mother, "Do you know what I want to be when I grow up, Mommie?" "No, dear," said her mother, "what would you like to be?" With genuine seriousness she replied, "A returned missionary."

In these and similar cases young people were being impressed by models. Local churches that participate in, talk about, pray about, and hear missionaries report on worldwide evangelization are churches that provide desperately needed models. They are not just models of missionaries; they are models of local churches busily doing what God has directed His people to do. The same dynamic operates in other features of the church's ministry.

**Producing workers.** Historically, churches involved in worldwide evangelization tend to produce missionaries much more than those that neglect it. The Karnes church, near Knoxville, Tennessee, accented world evangelism and sponsored a missions

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<sup>17</sup> See the essay in this book on DuPont employees.

<sup>18</sup> W. Joe Hacker, Jr., *Annual Report/ Mission Prepare: Field Report of Foreign Evangelists from Churches of Christ, 1968-1969* (Searcy, AR: Harding College, 1970), p. 4.

workshop for several years. At one point they could count more than a dozen individuals and couples who had decided to become message bearers in new areas as a result of those workshops.

**Peace.** Although exceptions to this generalization exist, churches that are involved in reaching out to others through evangelizing and benevolence seem to have fewer internal problems and more peace and harmony than those churches that neglect it. I am not referring to churches that merely send a few dollars to Africa or India, but to churches that enter into the spirit of what is being done, pray diligently for the work, and provide emotional support for the workers. Cleon Lyles of Little Rock, Arkansas once wrote, "From the time when the church here started doing mission work, our progress began to point upward." Churches thrive on the satisfaction that they are serving as God wants them to serve.

**Learning.** If done properly, worldwide evangelistic efforts usually throw Christians from the supporting church into contact with people very different from themselves. Often, they grow in their appreciation of what the gospel can do for people. Usually, those Christians come to see themselves differently as a result of that contact. A very poor teen-ager went from Memphis, Tennessee to a depressed area in Northern Belize to help in a vacation Bible school. When the workers reported back to the Memphis church, that teen-ager was one of the spokespersons and said, "I went to Belize feeling I was poor, but I am now convinced that I am rich." The church was better from having heard that remark from him.

Because the stakes are exceedingly high, the church should evangelize the world even if the effort to do so were mostly hardship and struggle for both senders and sent—as it is in some cases. However, wonderful results usually come to churches that do the will of the Lord in this matter.

For several decades the Hillsboro church in Nashville, Tennessee channeled a major part of its contributions into evangelism. Batsell Barrett Baxter, then preacher at that good church, once wrote, "It is our belief that an interest in those who are beyond our own borders is one of the reasons that the congregation remains vigorous and aggressive and continues to grow."



Through the years the Skillman Avenue church in Dallas, Texas supported much worldwide evangelism. One of its elders, John G. Young, once wrote, "Tis a somewhat paradoxical statement but if you would increase the home activities of a congregation, then do mission work. It *does* pay do mission work." As Paul stated, referring to his joy over what the Philippian church had done for him, it is "fruit that increases to your credit" (Phil. 4:17, ESV).

## Chapter 4

# " . . . No Lasting Trace of Your Visit"

(Slightly edited version of the article that appeared in the *Gospel Advocate* 129:19 [1 Oct. 1966]:586-87.)

In south-central Colorado, nestled between gentle, tree-covered mountains and resting beside a placid lake, lie the Big Meadow campgrounds. At one edge of the lake begins the Archuleta Trail which leads into the Weminuche Wilderness, part of a 467,400 acre plot administered by the San Juan and Rio Grande National Forests.

At the beginning of the trail one reads instructions about safety, camping, number of persons and animals permitted in a group, disposal of waste, and other items. The guidelines are all in the interest of protecting both hikers and the forest. At the end of the instructions is a summary admonition: "*Remember, leave no lasting trace of your visit.*" The ideal is to leave the forest as unspoiled as possible so other hikers may enjoy the same scenery and animal life.

Somehow that summary line reminded me of the unintended outcome of some disciple-making efforts, both ours and others'. In worldwide evangelization one intends to leave lasting evidence of the work, not as self-aggrandizement but for the glory of God. The failure to do so, however, is an old and disappointing story.

### ***Evangelistic Defeats***

In the 13th century the Mongol Empire in China opened its doors to outsiders. Beginning around 1250 or so, many Nestorian Christians began moving back into China from the borderlands, and by the end of the century Roman Catholic missionaries also had renewed their work in China. The Mongol dynasty fell in 1368; Moslem invaders slaughtered thousands, and the native Chinese dynasty which followed in the 1400s persecuted all foreign religions. Therein lay the downfall of all Nestorian Christianity: it had identified itself too much with the Mongol empire, and most of the people converted in China were outsiders, non-Chinese. Thus, by 1600 virtually nothing remained of the Christian presence. "Had a

European traveler, wandering through the streets of Hsianfu--the ancient capital of China-- . . . asked any native whether the Christian religion had ever been preached there, he would have gazed at the traveler with amused amazement, and answered, of course not."<sup>19</sup> There was "no lasting trace of their visit" in spite of over a century of Christian work.<sup>20</sup>

In some cases the losses have not been total, but they have been so drastic that one should raise serious questions about methods of evangelizing. Everything cannot be blamed on the hearers or politics.

When Islam began in the 600s Christianity in various forms had been in the Mediterranean Basin for over 500 years. Within 100 years, however, Christian capitulation to Islam was almost total in that area. That surrender was not due primarily the Muslim use of the sword, although commonly believed. The population also sought possible relief from a corrupt Roman government. At that time, however, Christians had such shallow faith - they had been so ill-taught after whatever conversion they experienced - that there was no real protection against the simple and aggressively taught new faith. Dr. Dwight Baker has provided a useful summary of that dramatic shift.<sup>21</sup>

In the eighteenth century, for example, a vigorous Russian Orthodox missionary enterprise was carried out to reach Muslims and pagans in the central and eastern parts of the Empire. Because the converts were inadequately taught and not sufficiently stabilized, however, the apostasy rate was enormous in the latter part of that century and the early nineteenth century.

By the first third of the nineteenth century, 13,058 of 14,796 baptized Tartars, formerly Muslims, had reverted (88.2% loss).

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<sup>19</sup> C. Cary-Elwes, *China and the Cross* (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1957):14.

<sup>20</sup> One exception: many years later a stone monument to the Nestorians was discovered.

<sup>21</sup> Dwight L. Baker, "How a Whole Church Vanish," *Christianity Today* (Nov. 25, 1966):3-5. The article is based on the author's Ph.D. dissertation on the subject.

Among those who had been won from paganism the losses were also great. Of 350,818 Chuvashes converts, 233,500 had apostatized (66.5% loss), 45,096 of 66,650 converted Tchermisses reverted (67.6% loss), and 4,409 out of 4,866 Voticks returned to their former posture (90.6% loss). Only the Mordvins, for understandable reasons not detailed here, remained steadfast in high numbers.

Stephen Neill remarks that, "The facts are so overwhelming as to amount to a grave condemnation of the whole Russian method of evangelism, through governmental pressure and favor without the kind of Christian teaching that could make conversion anything more than nominal."<sup>22</sup>

### ***Different With Us?***

One might be tempted to say that Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox missions are different from "our" approaches, and that teaching a more accurate gospel will not have such results. It is to be remembered, however, that the Russian Orthodox Church itself is a product of mission work from Greece, and that for some reason it found a home in Western Russia. The Roman Church also is firmly ensconced in several places in the world, although transplanted from another country. So, one may not dismiss their successful or unsuccessful works purely on the grounds that their initial message was not as biblical as others hold it should be. It is useful to recall that in the first century the accurate message often brought persecution!

What, then, about work by churches of Christ? Has it been more durable because a more accurate message has been taught? Between 1886 and 1939 no less than 140 missionaries from North American churches of Christ went out on their own or were sent out to at least seventeen countries. Apart from Japan, perhaps China, the Philippines, and two or three African countries, nothing of a durable nature remains of those efforts. In several other countries there is "no lasting trace of their visit," and in some cases what remains is so meager that it discourages workers.

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Neill, *History of Christian Mission* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin Books, 1961):439.

The different outcomes from evangelizing in new territory, whether done by churches of Christ or other churches, are traceable to several variables: length of work time, methods employed, warfare (as in China), message formulation, different degrees of receptivity, and so forth. Of course, in unreceptive, hostile areas the best of methods and sincere dedication yield few tangible results. The evidence indicates that most, if not all of those earlier missionaries with churches of Christ loved God, knew Scripture and worked hard.<sup>23</sup> But in several cases their work was so time-limited that they never acquired an understanding of the peoples among whom they worked. In other cases they followed methods which were already known by some Protestants to be fruitless in the production of stable, long-term expressions of the Christian faith. It is one thing for a church to be killed off while faithful; it is another matter for it to fizzle out through lack of direction, local leadership development, and appropriate spiritual nourishment.

### ***Time Will Tell...***

Many non-viable churches, like non-viable governments (Marxism, for example), may survive for several decades before their true nature can be observed. Often, the second or third generations of believers raise the awkward and vital questions neglected by teachers of the first generation, and unstable churches either die a slow, agonizing death or negotiate some type of syncretism with one or more pre-Christian religions in their area. This is a historical, long-term perspective on planting new faiths in an area. When churches in Korea, Russia, Germany, or anywhere else look, sound, and smell like they belong in another country, there is a grave danger of reversion, or even disappearance in the second or third generation-whatever church is involved.

The solution to these common and disturbing outcomes is not merely to work harder, but to work wiser. A good collection of helpful literature is currently in print on the biblical and practical approaches to starting churches which are likely to survive spiritual and cultural trials. Such literature should not be neglected.

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<sup>23</sup>See this author's account of several of those wonderful workers in *Lest We Forget: Mini-biographies of a Bygone Era* (Winona, MS: Choate Publications, 2010).

Furthermore, most of our Christian universities, colleges, and preacher training schools have at least one person who can share some of these principles at the local church level. Mission experience alone is not the basic criterion of helpfulness since it is possible for one to work ten or even twenty years in the wrong direction and never recognize it. Most long-term workers, however, learn several lessons the hard way and wish to pass them on to others to prevent duplication of mistakes.

Many seasoned missionaries cringe to see uninformed individuals and churches spend multiplied thousands of dollars in endeavors which are known to have unhealthy long-term results. Respect for church autonomy makes it difficult to know how to offer suggestions without being misunderstood. But how can one keep silent when money given by godly, hard-working people, and widows on Social Security is being used to support known failures or to achieve results which could be realized with a third (or less) of the expenditure? It is not easy to keep silent.

### ***A Better Way***

Happily, we have workers in several places in the world who have much to show for their work because, among other things, they prayerfully followed wise methods and tested principles. Places like Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, and the highlands of Guatemala are cases in point. Isolated churches in Western Europe got off on the right foot and still survive as viable churches, while others, after a quarter of a century or more were unable to pay their utility bills! They were taught (inadvertently) to be dependent on others for both leadership and funding. There are better ways, however, to employ human resources and spend sanctified money.

The summer of 1995 marked the completion of a fifteen-year plan carried out by a team of four couples in Campo Grande, Brazil. They left a solid church of 250 or so self-supporting and self-edifying disciples.

Over sixteen years of work among the Kipsigis of Kenya produced 140 or so churches, several with elders (figures from the mid-1960s). The Kipsigis were receptive, but the disciple-makers used informed to evangelize, plant churches, and train leadership.

Sustained and wise work in Singapore has realized a dozen or so viable churches with evangelistic thrusts. Some fine preachers have emerged there and are supported by national churches that are now reaching out to several other countries. In all these cases (and others not mentioned) workers followed some fairly well-known and "tested" principles as they taught solid biblical truth.

Teachers of missions in our Christian colleges and universities particularly can supply lists of useful works for both churches and missionaries. This writer has produced a handbook designed to help supporting-stewarding churches do a better job.<sup>24</sup> The stakes are high. These issues are not matters of petty opinions or preferences, unless wasting God's money and sending lovely, dedicated workers to produce long-range failures are desirable outcomes. Except in cases of despotism and severe persecution, it is possible to evangelize in such a manner that future generations will be able to see durable evidence of those efforts. Of course, God looks on the heart and can see the invisible spiritual dimensions of one's work. But it is His will that those who "trust and obey" Him express that trust in visible ways, as in worshipping and serving churches, compassionate service, and overt evangelization. In other words, God wills that there be some "lasting trace of your visit" with the gospel.

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<sup>24</sup> C. Philip Slate, *Handbook on Missions for Local Churches* (Bedford, TX: Missions Resource Network, 2008). The publisher of the book, MRN, is now a huge resource for churches.

## Chapter 5

# WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

*(A speech given during the Abilene Christian University Lectures, 1988)*

Odd as it may seem, I feel compelled to begin with a disclaimer so people will not misunderstand or be unnecessarily offended at the title of this lecture. Some churches and individuals have never begun to think, pray, or do anything else about worldwide evangelizing; and for them the question “Where to begin?” is appropriate assuming they want to begin! On the other hand, some of our churches have given as much as half of their contributions toward evangelizing outside their own area, so I do not wish to offend them by implying that they need to *begin*.

In Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice asks the cat, “Which way do we go from here?” That may be a more appropriate question for several of our churches which have been busy but not satisfied with their global efforts. The cat’s answer was typical Carroll vintage: “That *all depends* on where you want to go.” The four directives I now propose are designed to help churches and individuals to move from where they are to more effective and God-honoring efforts in covering the earth with the knowledge of God.

### **I. Rehearsal: Raise an Ebenezer**

In spite of the broad feeling that history is dull and unrewarding, I am on good biblical ground when I suggest the need to be aware of what we have already done in our global evangelizing. When pious men of Israel wanted to make an important point or move Israel on to better actions, they commonly rehearsed what God had already done for and through them. Consider how many times they told the Exodus story. Toward the end of his life Joshua rehearsed what God had done for Israel as a prelude to his plea for their loyalty to the Lord (Josh. 24:1-15). Rehearsal is scattered throughout Solomon’s speech and prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Ki. 8). Stephen used it as a means of confronting the Jews with their own behavior before God (Acts 7). Rehearsal, telling the story, was a serious way of creating divine perspective on life and responsibility.



I want to contend that God continues to work through His people. In my office I have in one frame the pictures of eighty-four people associated with world evangelism in about 1933. There is a youthful George Benson (China), an already mature J. M. McCaleb (Japan), the Merritts and Lawyers of Africa, and many others. Several biographies need to be written on people in that collection.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, many in our brotherhood know very little of the work done by our brothers and sisters in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in many cases they know little of the evangelization by our contemporaries. They have hardly heard of the McCalebs, Merritts, Shoemakers, and others, who for half a century gave themselves to other cultures for the sake of the gospel. They know almost nothing of Hettie Ewing, Elizabeth Bernard, Lily Cypert, and Sarah Andrews, single women who gave decades of their lives to serve others with the gospel. All who are ignorant of their work are poorer for it.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain it was fairly common to write two biographies on famous missionaries: a full version for adults, and a version for children. The reading public knew about the work of Livingston, Carey, Moffatt, Paton, and others. Those rehearsals of self-sacrificing, diligent work by others created visions in people's minds and planted seeds in children's hearts. That can and should be repeated among us, perhaps with videos and other electronic media as well as books.

Often our brotherhood is ignorant of what has been accomplished through our workers. For example, most people seem to be ignorant of those hundreds and hundreds of churches in Nigeria, of what has been done in Western Europe since the end of World War II, of churches in Japan that survived the Second World War, of the good national evangelists that have been developing in various countries, and of the godly character found in people who have come out of paganism to serve the true and living God. That information can be found in the various editions of *The Harvest Field* (1947, 1958), or *World Radio News*, the *Christian Chronicle*, and other papers; or one may read books like Bessie

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<sup>25</sup> Two decades after this speech, and after twenty years of piecemeal research I wrote a little work that contains information on all eighty-four people in that picture. See my *Lest We Forget: Mini-Biographies of Missionaries from a Bygone Generation* (Winona, MS: J. C. Choate Publications, 2010).

Chenault's "*Give Me this Mountain*," or Dow Merritt's *The Dewbreakers*. The information is available but it has not been communicated from pulpits and in classrooms.

There are, of course, dangers in rehearsing the past. We can idealize far from ideal situations. It is possible to make a tradition or norm out of a method which worked well in one era but not in others, or some places but not others. Israel's rehearsal often called attention to people's inadequate behavior, as did Stephen (Acts 7), as well as to God's faithfulness. Looking back can identify blunders as well as show good results, so it is possible to learn from it as well as to rejoice in it.

It is often the case in "missions situations," in virgin territory, so to speak, that one is impressed afresh with the genius of the plea for responsible Christianity without the albatross of the Reformation or even the 19<sup>th</sup> century British and American restoration efforts. The commitment to operate out of Scripture as one deals with the various cultures of the world gives great facility for meaningful evangelization. In California I met a Japanese gentleman who was planning to return to Japan in an effort to get people to join the "Cumberland Presbyterian" brand of Christianity. I did not envy him in his planned task; I would hate to be charged with the responsibility of convincing Japanese to become Cumberland anything, or Missouri anything, or Scandinavian anything. A 1960 Moody Press volume, *The Indigenous Church*, records the problem Northern Brazilians had when told they should be Southern Baptists. Donald McGavran, who worked in India for nearly forty years, tells of indigenous Protestants at Pan-Indian meetings who joked about whether they were Scandinavian or Missouri Synod Lutherans. I am glad our ideal rises above some of those ecclesiastical blunders. We need not do so, but at times some have thoughtlessly invented "scandals" in addition to the cross and other items that are inherent parts of the gospel and Christian way of life. The offense of the cross must remain, but we are not called upon to add to that offense. Happily, with our idealism we need not do so, and in that I rejoice.

In spite of our blunders, God has somehow used us. We have something to show for our efforts. It may be nothing to brag about since God deserves infinitely more than we have given, but we have much more to show for our efforts in many areas than

various Protestant groups that have been there longer and invested far more money in their efforts than we have. For the God-glorifying efforts today we should be both grateful and encouraged. Like Samuel, we should raise our “Ebenezer,” do something to celebrate the fact that “Hitherto the Lord has helped” (1 Sam. 7:12). I challenge teachers and preachers to become familiar with some of what has been done and then pass it on to others. Invite a missionary simply to tell in suitable circumstances about his, her, or their work. Christians deserve to know some of the effects of the praying, giving, preaching, teaching, and serving in the past. Rehearse it as a prelude to moving on from wherever you are.

## ***II. To See As God Sees***

When the prophet Samuel was in Bethlehem to anoint Israel's new king, Jesse's sons were to walk before him. When Samuel saw Eliab he thought, “Surely the Lord's anointed is before him.” In response to that impression, however, the Lord made a statement which has profound significance for people's understanding the gap which exists between themselves and God. “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). When people become Christians they should begin a life-long process of trying to see as God sees. It is one of the purposes of revelation to make known to people God's perspective on the world and its contents.

A common metaphor in John's writings is that of “walking in darkness.” Paul declared that the god of this world “has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). “Seeing” is important. Paul's own goals were to preach to the Gentiles “the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things” (Eph. 3:8-9). Those of us who have been Christians for some time understand, at least partially, the effects of our own deliverance from the guilt and power of sin. Very often, however, we can fail as churches and individuals because we fail to see God in our personal and group ethics.

It is very easy and very common for people to be too preoccupied with their own little zip code and to use life there as the yardstick for measuring everything else. The Greeks regarded everything outside Hellas as barbarian. Sir Flopping Flutter in the restoration play declared that “beyond Hyde Park all is desert.” J. S. Whale tells of an amusing exchange in the smoking room of an Atlantic liner several years ago. A few Americans were extolling the virtues of their country, when an Englishman remarked naively, “Yes, but it’s so far away.” At that the New Yorker replied with equal naiveté, “From where?” Both men were expressing the same ethnocentric approach to life. Their experiences were the norms for everyone else.

We can chuckle at such narrow vision, but it is very serious when it expresses itself in the worldview of the local church or individual. The kind of perspective we have on self, the world, and God, influences both our own ability and our service. The Philippian Christians were to do more than see themselves as saved from sins individually. Rather, while living out their faith in the specificity of the streets of Philippi, their zip code, they were also to see themselves as citizens of heaven, from which their Savior would come and transform their bodies (Phil. 3:20-21). Life and service in your town, as in Philippi, will be different when you see your place in the universe and in relationship to the future.

The story-line of the entire Bible makes it very clear that God’s “scheme of redemption” involves efforts to bring to Himself the nations of the world. It was promised to Abraham that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). The Psalms are full of the longing for all nations to know the Maker of heaven and earth (Ps. 68:31-33; 72:8-11; 86:8-10; 96:10-13; 102:12-22; etc.). The writers of the Psalms rise above the common Jewish provincialism and ethnocentricity rebuked in the book of Jonah and elsewhere. The prophets point out that Israel at best was to be a “light to the nations,” the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6,7; 60:1-3). It is unlikely that many people today realize what a bombshell it was in the discerning Jewish mind when Jesus directed His apostles to disciple “all the nations” (Matt. 28:19-20). That meant that the time had finally come when the prophetic longing for the salvation of the nations was finally to be realized.

In the senior year of my undergraduate studies, members of the junior class wrote their prophecy for the senior class. Several students in my college who were leaders in neither academics nor sports were pictured as being missionaries to Africa. The junior pundits prophesied good progress until the missionaries tried to teach a group of plate-lipped people how to say "Zerubbabel!" That jesting prophecy was really a revelation of how little the juniors saw as God saw. What a tremendous thing takes place, in heaven's view, when people from the nations, pagans, sophisticated or not, turn from idols to the true and living God (1 Thess. 1:9).

What a priority it should be, this evangelizing of the nations. Some people with limited vision view world evangelization as supporting a preaching point, as someone has said, "about three Stuckey's stops down the Interstate." That is far from the way God wants us to view the world. Our hearts should ache because there are tribes and peoples who evidently know more about Coca Cola than they do about Jesus Christ. If Jesus were to walk among the churches today and speak to them, what would he say to your congregation about its priorities?

In the great throne scene of Revelation 4 and 5 the question was raised, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" The answer came that it was Jesus, the Lamb of God. Note the reason given for that worthiness:

Worthy art thou to take the scroll  
And open its seals,  
for thou wast slain and by thy blood  
Didst ransom men for God  
From every tribe and tongue and  
People and nation,  
And hast made them a kingdom and  
Priests to our God,  
And they shall reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10).

As surely as I value what Jesus did for me, I must acknowledge that His death was for every tribe and nation. As surely as I believe that it was God's will for others to take the gospel to my family in the East Tennessee during World War II, I must also believe that it is His will for the gospel to be taken to all for whom Christ died.

I call on preachers and teachers to help fellow Christians see as God sees in terms of a hurting world that believes in many gods but does not know the “Maker of heaven and earth.” We will not take His world seriously until we do this.

### **III. *Send Prepared People***

In the aftermath of the Biafran War in Nigeria, I asked a former missionary in that country whether anyone had taught the Nigerian Christians anything about carnal warfare. His judgment was that it had not crossed their minds to do so. Conceivably fellow-Christians from different sections of the country could have been killing each other as, regrettably, in the North American Civil war in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In a growing and developing continent a new Christian may face a bloodbath, as in Uganda, or be in high political office in a few years, as in Zambia. They will need the tutelage of competent and mature teachers.

I raise this issue only as an illustration of the way in which people who cross culture lines to communicate the gospel will be fanning out into a complex world. It cannot be assumed that conditions are similar to those “back home.” Apart from the usual necessity of learning a new language, there is the need to enter into the very mindset of the people if one is going to make sense of the gospel and extend its implications into broader life. Approaches will be made to peoples of the world who are idolaters with no sense of sin. Where does one begin with the message? Their assumptions are different about marriage, property rights, use of space, killing, unclean foods, and scores of other things. It can be even harder to help them live victorious and holy lives in their culture. Thus, much more is involved than the initial winning of individuals to Christ. Viable churches must be established so that people can be nurtured in holiness and fortified against the darkness which surrounds them. That can be done—it has been done.

All of this means that among the people we send out must be those who are equipped to think through some of the long-term issues. Different kinds of people are needed. Some are foot-soldiers who love people and relate to them meaningfully. These often do good work in bringing people to Christ. The consequences, however, are too heavy for us to send groups of incompetent and unproven people to virgin territory for *long-term* work. Rather, it is

important to send young and old alike who have specific training for the tasks they intend to undertake. I am unwilling to set down a single list of credentials since we need to send different types of people for different types of work. For fifteen years I have taught courses on global disciple-making at the Harding Graduate School of Religion in Memphis, and I feel good about what our graduates have done. I also teach in a para-missionary training program at the Highland Street church in Memphis. There we try to prepare people with other skills (education, agriculture, automobile mechanics, carpentry, medicine, and so forth) to go and work along side of those whose tasks are primarily to preach and teach, to develop churches and leadership. I also feel good about what some of those people have done. There is room for both types, as well as variations on both. If we are to move forward from where we are now, the question supporting churches must ask is, "Are these workers prepared for the work they want to undertake?"

I am glad that at times we have sent out men and women who could have filled about any suitable position of responsibility in their homeland—teaching, preaching, administration, writing, counseling, or whatever. I am reminded of what Stephen Neill said of Thomas Valpy French, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century missionary to India and then Arabia. Neill remarked that French "would have been distinguished in any career that he chose to follow." Allowing for a bit of overstatement, French was just a competent human being. We need more of that!

The largest number of churches of Christ in the world is currently (1988) located in the USA, which is also the wealthiest country in the world. We have the best training programs for cross-cultural evangelism that we have ever had, and many of the best books ever written on missiology are either in print or otherwise available, and we know more now than ever before about how to screen people for cross-cultural and team work. What remains to be done is for the church to insist that these facilities be used so that we send dedicated and competent workers to the peoples of the world. The task is too important in God's sight for us to send less than some of our best.

This reminds me of an incident that occurred in the time of Charlemagne. There was at that time a famous teacher named Alcuin, who on one occasion was telling Charlemagne about the

Apostle Paul. The king exclaimed, "I want twelve men like that as secretaries!" Alcuin replied, "But, Sir, the Lord Jesus had but one, and would you have twelve?" I would have answered, "Yes," but not to use them as secretaries. If we have "Pauls" today then why not use some of them the way in which Jesus used His Paul? There is nothing about the passage of time that means the kind of work Paul did in the first century is any less important today. If we want to move on from here, we will increase the number of competent, mature workers.

#### **IV. Deepen the Spiritual Life**

When one studies the history of Christian missions, it seems possible to make at least one generalization, viz., when people go to different cultures, sophisticated or lowly, and give many years of sacrificial service to them, often planting their bones among the converts, they are usually people of keen dedication and deep devotion to the Lord God. A modern case of it may be seen in Elizabeth Elliott's *Shadow of the Almighty*, in which the inner life of Jim Elliott is shown. Over and over it can be observed in the lives of people like William Carey, J. Hudson Taylor, and John Paton, among the Protestants. It may be seen in our own brothers and sisters such as J. D. and Pearl Merritt, J. M. McCaleb, Sarah Andrews, and others.

If we are to move on from where we are in doing our part in evangelizing the world, it is imperative that local churches deepen the spiritual tone of their lives. Worship must be enriched so that people prostrate their spirits before God. Classes and sermons must more and more help people relate to Jesus Christ so that He is for us Lord of life at a deeper level. Christians must be challenged to get a handle on the threatening materialism of our day. Historically, churches that have not kept up their guard have tended to mirror their culture more than change it to the glory of God. When the national posture has been one of reaching out by colonizing, trading, or even waging war, many churches have tended to reach out also, perhaps even imperialistically. When the countries have been isolationists, churches have tended to be withdrawn, focusing on themselves and their immediate environment. Here in the USA the churches may well be influenced by the period of national isolation following the Vietnam War; the churches may mirror the societal focus on "self-improvement" as described in the now



popular book, *Habits of the Heart*. It seems always to be useful to engage in healthy self-criticism or evaluation. It can pave the way for loyalty to Jesus Christ that rises above enslavement to local cultural values.

George Peters has argued that one reason many of the early Protestants did little-to-no foreign evangelism was that churches themselves lacked the spiritual vitality required for it. Individuals who became interested in world evangelism were supported by missionary societies rather than by churches. That is not an option for us, so it means that the churches themselves will need to have greater spiritual integrity and greater emphasis on godliness and serious discipleship. It is of more than passing interest to me that currently our largest churches produce disproportionately small numbers of preachers and missionaries. That seems to be more a problem of lifestyle than of size, because small churches may be relatively lifeless and exceptional large churches do produce workers. Where people are spectators rather than active servants, focusing more on “our church” and less on outsiders, chances are slim that missionaries and missionary interest will emerge in that context.

Who, then, will produce the workers? It cannot be left to our schools, valuable as their contributions may be, because it is the business of the church to produce disciplined, informed godliness, people who care little for shallow praise but much about the approval of God. People who do not know how to teach the gospel at home do not automatically learn how to do so by getting a plane ticket to another country. People sit in our pews that are capable of planting churches when they move to new locations, but the local church has not trained them to do so. In my judgment we need more gray hair in our worldwide efforts for two reasons: we need their judgment and steadiness, and most cultures of the world respect age more than does North American culture. Younger and older people alike need to have some phase of global disciple-making held out as an option, and when their interest emerges the church needs to encourage and support it.

All of this is related to the business of deepening our perceptions of God and His will for the world, of deepening our commitment to our Heavenly Father and His purposes. I know one missionary whose strategy involved encouragement of greater

spirituality in the home churches so he and others would be assured of a steady supply of quality missionaries. I see no real way of moving on meaningfully from where we are in the task of global evangelizing unless there is an increase in the spiritual dimension of what we are and what we do.

## ***Conclusion***

Churches of Christ stand as good a chance as any group—better chance than most groups—to preach an unfettered, bedrock gospel throughout the world. I am not referring solely to the churches of Christ in the USA and Canada, but to churches in many countries. We have an idealism that is biblically based; we have the money and training facilities to do more and better than we are doing. We seem most to falter, or do less than our best, at the perception and spiritual levels. These situations are correctable, however, if we will gratefully rehearse what has been done, strive more and more to see as God sees His world, send prepared people, and deepen our relationships with God.

### **Rise up, O men of God!**

Have done with lesser things;  
Give heart and mind and soul and strength  
To serve the King of kings.  
Rise up, O men of God!

The church for you doth wait,  
Her strength unequal to her task;  
Rise up, and make her great.

Lift high the cross of Christ!  
Tread where his feet have trod;  
As brothers of the Son of man,  
Rise up, O men of God.

--William P. Merrill

## Chapter 6

# WHAT ARE “MISSION TRIPS”?

(Originally published in the *Gospel Advocate* 151:10 [Oct. 2009]:16-18.)

Each winter and spring many churches and individuals receive letters from mostly young people who want to go on a “mission trip.” I have learned to inquire what that means.

Often we get in trouble by using non-biblical terms for biblical ideas and entities when we could do otherwise. The term “missions” is a case in point. That word is an Anglicized version of the Latin *missionem*, meaning “to send.” Greek equivalents are *apostellein*, “to send,” and *apostolos*, “one sent.” The English words “mission” and “missions” have long had a wide variety of applications and thus do not carry their own meanings; they must be defined by contexts. Even in modern religious usage the word often involves neither “sending” nor evangelizing (making disciples). Indeed, one fine book is entitled, *The Mission of God*. Further, as used now, “missions” may have little or nothing to do with teaching or even religion!

“Mission” was never used in either the KJV (1611) or ASV (1901). In the NIV it appears in five Old Testament verses (Josh. 22:3; 1 Sam. 15:18, 20; 21:2; Isa. 48:15) and in the New Testament only in Acts 12:25 where the reference is not to preaching but to Paul’s and Barnabas’ taking physical help from Antioch of Syria to the poor in Jerusalem (11:28-29). Here “mission” is an odd translation of *diakonia*, the common word for “ministry” or “service.” “Mission” is used similarly in both the NRSV (Judg. 18:5-6; 1 Sam. 15:18, 20; Acts 12:25) and the English Standard Version (Judg. 13:12; 1 Sam. 15:18; 2 Cor. 11:12); but in neither one does it refer a single time to preaching the gospel, evangelizing. Ironically, the 2 Cor. 11 passage is about the work of the false apostles at Corinth! Thus, even where “mission” is used in recent English New Testament translations it never refers to evangelizing. Yet people still commonly refer to Paul’s “missionary journeys” when the dominate idea is evangelizing and starting churches. This rather generic word requires those who use it at least to define what they mean by it. It does not carry its own meaning.

New Testament terminology allows us to refer rather precisely to deeds of compassion, mercy, and love. Similarly, one can be precise about proclaiming good news, preaching the word, making disciples, teaching the gospel, and so forth. If there is any benefit in making distinctions between compassionate service (benevolent actions), edification (building up the body), and evangelizing (announcing good news), and I think there is (Matt. 4:23), then it is important to explain which of these one has in mind when reference is made to “a mission trip.” People who are asked to help support such trips financially deserve to know the planned activities and objectives of such trips.

### ***Many Requests . . . for What?***

A brother once called me and wanted to set up an appointment to meet with our “missions committee” to talk about funding help for flood, hurricane, and earthquake victims. Wrong committee! Our church had a separate budget for compassionate service. Has “missions” become a catch-all to include a wide variety of activities carried on at a distance? If so, why should we even budget funds for “benevolence” or compassionate service? Perhaps it would do no harm and a lot of good to drop “missions” terminology and use “evangelizing” or “preaching the gospel” if that is what we mean, and “Christian service” or “compassionate service” if that is what we mean.

Large churches especially get scores of letters, e-mail messages, and phone calls from both students and others, asking for prayer and financial support for their “mission trips.” Rarely are such trips for evangelizing in the precise sense of that word. Students state they will be “helping” with children, building a house for the poor, distributing food and clothing, conducting VBS type classes, and visiting hospitals. They will assist in “amazing projects” and take advantage of “awesome opportunities” on their “mission trips.” One 16-year-old girl from another congregation had already made a dozen trips to Mexico, and she wanted us to help her go again! She sated nothing about what she did on those trips. Another university student has already made several trips to Central and South America and is now seeking funding from our church to make three more trips this year, one to Africa! All of this is called “mission work” even though it appears to be evangelistic in no specific sense. I wonder whether supporting churches and

individuals think they are evangelizing by supporting these efforts simply because they are called “mission trips.”

It is a good experience for North American students to go to developing countries and spend time with children who have one pair of shoes and only one change of clothing, but they could see some of that in several USA inner cities. I have helped send one of my children and two of my grandchildren to such places. Further, my wife and I have helped numerous students to make an initial trip to another country, but we do not now help students to go on second, third and fourth trips to do the same thing each time. Most of those trips are for helpful services rather than evangelism. At times compassionate services are rendered along with evangelizing, and that is productive. One wonders, however, whether church support of “mission trips” (as commonly conducted) should come out of the benevolence budget rather than the evangelism budget! Both expenditures are important, but it is useful to know with some degree of accuracy how much a church is giving to relieve human suffering and how much to preaching the gospel. When practically everything becomes “missions” then evangelistic work is rarely done! That is a verdict of history. Building a house for the poor is close to the heart of God, but through that act alone people do not become Christians. Similarly, evangelizing does not feed the poor. Both acts are important but they have different purposes and outcomes. Churches will do well to ascertain what they are being asked to support.

When people are less and less certain about their message, they do less and less proclamation, but they will often do good deeds. Dr. Albert Schweitzer was called a “missionary” when he went off to the Lambaréné Forest in French Equatorial Africa (now Gabon) to do “medical missions” in the service of a Jesus whose existence, at least as we know Him, he doubted! Schweitzer didn’t evangelize. In 1970 Dr. Donald McGavran claimed that for Protestants “eighty percent and more of the activities of missions today are organized good deeds and social action” that take the attention of churches “off the propagation of the Gospel.”<sup>26</sup> Some student groups have arrived in other countries with little idea of what

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<sup>26</sup> Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1970), p. 6.

they were to do, and in one case I know were not even expected by the orphanage! As an individual, do you want to support that kind of imprecise version of “missions”? Should a church do so? It is not too much to request information on the plans for the trip.

### ***Valuable Short-Term Work***

When seasoned preachers go to India to give two weeks or more of intensive teaching in English to strengthen new converts and churches, the investment is positive. Short-term humanitarian work can often help local people to interpret more accurately who these Christians are, but it is better done where local Christians can follow up with more explicitly evangelistic teaching. When Christians go to areas to follow up large numbers of WBS students the outcomes are usually fruitful. People who work in the "Let's Start Talking" program are trained before they go, and once there they get people into the text of Scripture.

It is often argued that the majority of our long-term missionaries were once short-term workers. That is likely so, given the large number of people who go on short-term trips and the comparatively small number of long-term missionaries. However, that is much like saying 90+% of teenagers who get cancer have watched basketball on television. It might be good to count people who have gone on several “missions trips” but became neither long-term missionaries nor particularly keen supporters of long-term workers. Many students go on short-term missions trips because they are already interested in that kind of work, and the interest may have been created by hearing a missionary speak, reading a missionary biography, or participating in good Bible study classes rather than the missions trip. So, I am not convinced by this argument; the cause-and-effect relationship has not been demonstrated. When high school graduates spend two years in Sunset's AIM program, for example, they get a real taste of what it means to evangelize, to teach the gospel to the lost. The evidence is slim-to-none that purely humanitarian work creates such evangelistic interest.

Often thousands of dollars are poorly stewarded for the lack of insight on how to prepare for, conduct, and debrief short-term experiences so that the results will be maximized. According to the 2009 Evangelical *Missions Maker Magazine*, “roughly three-fourths

of all STMs [Short Term Missions] are ‘done poorly’” (p. 19). The Minneapolis based Short Term Evangelistic Missions (STEM) organization has done careful research on short-term efforts. They report that three stages of planning must be undertaken if short-term efforts are to be productive: *Before they go* (What plans do they make for the known tasks before them, health, relationships, etc.?), *when they are at the place of work* (Who will direct their day-to-day work? How will they relate to local Christians?), and *once they return* (Research indicates a period of debriefing and reflecting is as valuable for the workers as what is done on the field. Reports need to be made.). Churches will contribute to more meaningful short-term work if they inquire about the plans for these three phases of the work. Asking such questions can prod STM leaders to make better preparations.

After becoming informed about short-term work churches will save themselves both time and frustration by formulating a policy for short-term support as they do for long-term support. Will they support Christian service projects (building, repairing, painting, etc.) and/or evangelizing/teaching? How much will they allocate for each person or group? Will they require a written proposal? Taking these steps will both guide the church’s expenditures and help STM groups to do better work for the Lord.

## Chapter 7

# UNFINISHED BUSINESS: THE CHALLENGE OF SECOND AND THIRD GENERATION CHURCHES

(The bulk of this material was presented in a speech at a fund-raising and communication dinner in Nashville, TN on behalf of African Christian Schools Foundation, September, 2010. It has been slightly edited, including the addition of a few footnotes, to address general concerns in leadership development.)

It has now been fifty years and more since I borrowed and read a copy of Pierre Leconte du Nouy's book, *Human Destiny* (1947). I remember little about its main thesis, but he used a one-line metaphor I wish to borrow. He stated, "A microbe that lives in a crack in the skin of an elephant has little idea of what an elephant is like." That is a useful metaphor since it is so much like many humans. It is easy for us to get involved in smaller things and lose part of their meaning and significance because we fail to see the larger entity of which they are a part, *the "elephant."*

It is easy to get involved in the details of operating and promoting something like African Christian Schools without seeing the larger picture. Someone, in fact several people, must be involved in those details and see to it that this and that are done so those eager men and women, boys and girls in Africa can get needed Christian education and training. It is regrettable, however, when we don't see the larger picture of which our localized work is a part. So, tonight I want to talk about the "elephant" before I talk about the microbe!

### ***The Huge Shift in Centers of Christian Population and Influence***

Although Christianity had its beginning in a spot where the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe meet,<sup>27</sup> it has spread

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Marty, *The Christian World: A Global History* (New York: Modern Library, 2007): 29.



unevenly from that point. That is part of the story involved in the history of Christian missions. To bring the story to modern times, however, it is important to note that in 1900 about 90% of those who called themselves Christians in the broad sense lived in the North and West, chiefly in Europe and North America. A hundred years later, by the year 2000 at least 75% of those who call themselves Christians were in the South and East, chiefly in SE Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The story is similar for us in churches of Christ. In 1900 most of the churches with which we were familiar were located in North America, with lesser numbers in the United Kingdom and its territories and commonwealth countries. Today, however, using the best figures I know and the judgment of friends who are supposed to know more than I about specific countries, it seems safe to say that between 65% and 75% of the members of churches of Christ as we know them are in the Southern Hemisphere, chiefly in India, Africa, and Latin America. The typical member of churches of Christ today, if there is such a creature, is a person of color (not white), and if he or she speaks English it will often be one of several languages she or he uses. I remember one of Dr. Dan Hardin's cartoons in which two Westerners were looking at a man several yards away who was obviously African, and the caption under the picture read, "Poor fellow—illiterate in seven languages!" Given the make-up of the world today, the typical member of Christ's church as we know it ought not to look like most of us in this room. Churches of Christ are in almost every country of the world, though in some of those countries we are barely there; but the concentration of our churches and members is in the Southern Hemisphere. Many of these are new Christians and are in new congregations where leadership is underdeveloped. But they are hungry for education and eager to serve. Several of our churches in Africa are now sending out missionaries, as are some in Asia. Indeed, it is accurate to say that the majority of the churches that have been started in Africa, and possibly Asia as well, have been started by nationals rather than by foreigners. That is all to the good. In that we should rejoice. Today sister churches in Africa are sending missionaries to other parts of Africa, to Europe, and the UK, to Canada and even the USA. I am thinking particularly of brothers and sisters from Ghana. Singaporeans go to mainland China, the Philippines, and other places. Our brothers (perhaps

sisters, too) from South Korea have gone to both China and the former Soviet Union.

As I look at this “elephant,” these aggressive expressions of New Testament Christianity in the Southern Hemisphere, I must think about our responses to it. Overall, I have two reactions, in addition to profound thanks to our Father who is using our brothers and sisters elsewhere. Both of my reactions involve works like those of African Christian Schools.

***First***, it just makes sense to respond aggressively to those huge populations that are eager to learn and develop in Christian service. I don’t mean that we are to intrude. They are asking for our help but not our dominance. Of course, there are several ways to respond to those educational and training needs, and some of them are quite inexpensive. I think of regional workshops, leadership training by extension (where the teachers do the traveling), week-long training sessions, cassette tapes and DVDs, non-residential schools (such as Nations University), etc. In this regard, ACSF is operating in areas where there is great receptivity to the gospel. It just makes good sense to double up work in highly receptive population areas. We have had schools located where people are not eager to learn, but that is not the case in sub-Saharan Africa. It is imperative to have good training entities in Africa, India, and Latin America. The nature of the “elephant” demands it.

***Second***, the kind of training in our situation demands thoughtful, intentional responses. The vast majority, but certainly not all, of our churches in Africa are young since they have been started during the past 40 years or so. We know, of course, that there were churches of Christ in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that the word spread from South Africa to Malawi by 1906. The majority, however, were started after 1950. That means that most churches do not have developed leadership, a thoughtful set of hymns, and well-reasoned responses to the most pressing needs on their “elephant.”

I have been twice each to Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania, and once to Malawi. One memory I have from several of those countries is seeing the large number of incomplete church buildings. Some have all the walls up but lack a roof, doors, and windows. Others have only a foundation and a few walls

constructed. In some cases I have seen sizeable trees growing in what would be the main assembly part of the building! Those incomplete buildings are a kind of metaphor of the condition of a lot of the congregations. Like the churches in Crete, they need many things “set in order.” But that takes time. It is one thing to grow a squash, but quite another to grow a good oak tree. New churches can have in them a number of really dedicated people, people who are willing to die for their faith in the Lord, while congregationally, they are lacking depth and adequacy. This is a huge challenge, this condition of the unfinished, underdeveloped churches.

I know that Dr. Stan Granberg edited a book in 2001 entitled *100 Years in Africa*.<sup>28</sup> Actually, we have had churches there since before 1896 since John Sherriff and a brother named Seddon moved from Australia to South Africa in that year and found small churches already in both Cape Town and Johannesburg. We know little about Seddon, but Sherriff supported himself as a stonemason, working mostly in Southeast Africa in what today are Zambia and Zimbabwe. In the 1920s and 1930s several brothers and sisters went to East Africa from the USA: the Shorts, Lawyers, Merritts, Scotts, Garretts, Browns, and Reeses. A lot of their work remains. But it was not until after WWII, and even in recent years, that we began to spread out farther, finally going into the former French colonies of Ivory Coast, Benin, Togo and other parts. Just now a team is studying Portuguese in preparation for going into Angola, where we have likely never had workers in residence. Thus, the vast majority of our churches are young. This is part of the big picture.

Two types of challenges emerge in second and third generation churches, and discerning leaders will be sensitive to them. On the one hand, as children from the first generation grow up, they often ask questions about the Christian faith and how “church” is done, questions that their parents never asked. Further, they are concerned about the implications of the Christian worldview for life as they deal with it in their context. On the other hand, the second and third generations often lose some of the fire in their faith. Cowper wrote about this in his hymn, *O for a Closer*

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<sup>28</sup> Stanley Granberg, editor, *100 Years of African Missions—Essays in Honor of Wendell Broom* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2001).

*Walk With God*: “Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord? Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and His word?”<sup>29</sup> What can be done about these phenomena?

Daniel von Allmen, a Swiss Protestant who taught for several years in the Cameroons, observed at least part of Africa. In 1975, based on his readings and observations, he wrote an article that has become quite famous.<sup>30</sup> In it he observed that rooting Christianity in new territory involves at least four stages, and these are worthy of our thoughtful attention even though we may want to amend them.

(1) **Missionaries**: the initial preaching of the basic gospel, by whatever means, is imperative. It has to be presented as a “good news” message about Jesus Christ in each context. This is the place where some stop—winning “precious souls” and baptizing them—but it is only the beginning.

(2) **Translators**: that is, for the long-term existence and growth of the new church it must have the Scriptures, the Bible, in a language it can understand. Even if most people are illiterate they can hear the Word of God read to them, an important feature of the early church’s life (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 1 Tim. 4:13).<sup>31</sup> Along with the availability of Scripture is the need for indigenous Christians to know how to “handle aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). There are no substitutes, however, for the church’s knowing the content of Scripture.

(3) **Poets**: Von Allmen argues that it is important to get the gospel into people’s hearts at a level that involves their emotions and feelings. He argues appropriately for the importance of having indigenous hymns, and for people to produce devotional materials—stories and poems that speak to the heart as well as to the head. There was good reason for Wesley’s saying, “I don’t care

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<sup>29</sup> On this phenomenon see Stephen Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths: The Dialogue with Other Religions* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; New York/London: Oxford University Press, 1970): 209-210.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel von Allmen, “The Birth of Theology: Contextualization as the Dynamic Element in the Formation of New Testament Theology,” *International Review of Mission* 64 (1975): 37-52.

<sup>31</sup> Compare the often reprinted work by Adolf Harnack, *Bible Reading in the Early Church*.

who writes your theologies as long as I can write your hymns.” There is some truth to that, although it is not the whole truth. Luther and many others realized the critical function of the church’s singing appropriate songs and hymns.

(4) **Theologians:** Traditionally we in churches of Christ have shied away from the word “theology” since we have heard so much about how dangerous and useless it is. That is true if we are referring to human theology, theology based on some contemporary philosophy into which Scripture is pressed. All of us do theology, however, even Charlie Brown in the “Peanuts” comic strip! Every time we think or talk about the implications of our belief in the Creator who supplies our needs, or how Jesus Christ sustains us in difficult times, or how we try to apply biblical principles in our world, we are “doing theology.” When a preacher in the USA begins with biblical teaching about material things and treasures on earth and so forth, and then relates that to our lives by challenging us to think about how many “things” we have (useless things), then he is doing theology based on Scripture, even though it is thought of as a sermon. What von Allmen means is that sooner or later individuals among these new believers must learn how to relate biblical teaching to the pressing concerns of life in their home territory. Yes, everyone needs to do it at some level, but it is important to develop leaders who know how to do it adequately.<sup>32</sup> Where churches do not have that kind of spiritual and intellectual leadership they tend to blend their pre-Christian culture with biblical understandings, just like Israel did with the Canaanite religion and thus earned the wrathful denunciations of the prophets.

But how will people be trained to do this? Education of the wrong sort can be provided. I was asked a few years ago to look at the curricula of ten Preachers’ Training Schools in the southern part of India. I was disappointed that in several cases curricula from the USA had just been transported to India. With but one or two

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<sup>32</sup> Dr. Rick Trull has made a fine contribution to the training of local people to do their own “theologizing,” their own understanding of Scripture and the ability to relate its premises to pressing concerns in their context. Richard E. Trull, Jr., *The Fourth Self: Theological Education to Facilitate Self-Theologizing for Local Church Leaders in Kenya*. “Bible & Theology in Africa,” 14 (New York: Peter Lang, 2013).

exceptions I saw little evidence of developing curricula designed to prepare Indian workers to meet some of the most pressing issues in southern India: popular Hinduism, Christian life in poverty, dealing with the tacit caste system, persecution, and so forth. Unless we have some training mechanisms like African Christian Schools, especially at the higher levels, I think we will do far less than our best.

Let me illustrate by quoting from a segment by John S. Mbiti. He was born in Kenya in 1931 and his parents wanted him to have the best education possible. They sent him to schools in Kenya, Uganda, the UK, and the United States. Eventually, in 1963 he earned a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in the UK. Though he was western-educated, he realized the critical importance of dealing with African issues in their context. In this article from which I shall read, he points out the wrong way to go about training people to serve meaningfully in Africa.<sup>33</sup> In this text he is referring to a fictitious situation, but one that could easily happen:

“He learned German, Greek, French, Latin, and Hebrew, in addition to English, church history, systematics, homiletics, exegesis, and pastoralia, as one part of the requirements for his degree. The other part, the dissertation, he wrote on some obscure theologian of the Middle Ages. Finally, he got what he wanted: a Doctorate in Theology. It took him nine and a half years altogether, from the time he left his home until he passed his orals and set off to return. He was anxious to reach home as soon as possible, so he flew, and he was glad to pay for his excess baggage which, after all, consisted only of the Bible in various languages he had learned, plus Bultmann, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Brunner, Buber, Cone, Küng, Moltmann, Niebuhr, Tillich, *Christianity Today*, *Time Magazine* . . .

“At home, relatives, neighbors, old friends, dancers, musicians, drums, dogs, cats, all gather to welcome him back. The fatted calves are killed; meat is roasted; girls giggle as they survey him surrounded by excess baggage; young children have their imaginations rewarded—they had only heard about him but now

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<sup>33</sup> John Mbiti, “Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church” in *Mission Trends*, No. 3, edited by Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist Press; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 6ff. Reading/quotation from pp. 6-8

they see him; he, of course, does not know them by name. He must tell about his experiences overseas, for everyone has come to eat, to rejoice, to listen to their hero who has studied so many northern languages, who has read so many theological books, who is the hope of their small but fast-growing church, the very incarnation of theological learning. People bear with him patiently as he struggles to speak his own language, as occasionally he seeks the help of an interpreter from English. They are used to sitting down and making time; nobody is in a hurry; speech is not a matter of life and death. Dancing, jubilation, eating, feasting—all these go on as if they were nothing else to do, because the man for whom everyone had waited has finally returned.” You current and former workers in Africa are familiar with scenes like this. Mbiti continued. . .

“Suddenly there is a shriek. Someone has fallen to the ground. It is his older sister, now a married woman with six children and still going strong. He rushes to her. People make room for him, and watch him. ‘Let’s take her to the hospital,’ he called urgently. They are stunned. He becomes quiet. They all look at him bending over her. Why doesn’t someone respond to his advice? Finally a schoolboy says, ‘Sir, the nearest hospital is 50 miles away, and there are few buses that go there.’ Someone else says, ‘She is possessed, Hospitals will not cure her!’ The chief says to him, ‘You have been studying theology overseas for 10 years. Now help your sister. She is troubled by the spirit of her great aunt.’ He looks around. Slowly he goes to get Bultmann, looks at the index, finds what he wants, reads again about spirit possession in the New Testament. Of course he gets the answer: Bultmann has demythologized it. He insists that his sister is not possessed. The people shout, ‘Help your sister; she is possessed!’ He shouts back, ‘But Bultmann has demythologized demon possession.’” Then Mbiti added, “(This story is entirely fictional and is not based on the experience of a real person.)” Then Mbiti continued . . .

“Fantasy? No, for these are realities of our time.” He then wrote about a sharp contrast. On the one hand, Christianity has been truly globalized in the last 200 years, thanks to the work of missionaries and their national fellow-workers. But on the other hand, he claims that “theological outreach has not matched this expansion. Consequently, half of today’s Christendom lies outside the fenced cloisters of traditional theology. This theology is largely

ignorant of, and often embarrassingly impotent in the face of, human questions in the churches of Africa, Latin America, parts of Asia, and the South Pacific.”<sup>34</sup>

In our society we have thoughtful, Bible-believing men and women who deal with various pressing issues in the churches. What about beginning and end of life issues, such as in vitro fertilization, abortion, and euthanasia, subjects that are not directly mentioned in Scripture but which we must face with biblical principles. Faithful Christian theologians take biblical principles of respect for life and the prohibition of life-taking and relate them to the abortion issue. That is the theological process, and we are blessed when thoughtful people help us to work through some of these issues. Where we don't have that kind of intentional thought we are doomed to follow our secular world. Jesus Christ fades into the background; God is marginalized. That will happen to churches in the southern Hemisphere unless some kind of responsible training is given that will raise their level of life. Issues involving evil spirits, ancestors, magic, and the like are living issues in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

A few years ago I was invited to Malawi to teach church leaders. The two subjects they wanted me to address particularly were “Biblical Interpretation” and “Witchcraft.” Churches of Christ were started in Malawi, as far as we know, from South Africa in 1906, and some people estimate that today not a single person in the entire country is more than ten miles from a congregation! That is saturation. Why, however, is witchcraft still a problem within the church? Have not the preachers and other leaders been sufficiently educated in ways to respond to that cultural expression that is a part of the landscape? It is always exciting and satisfying to train people to evangelize and plant new churches. We know that is God's will. We give far less than our best, however, if we don't help to prepare people to deal with their most pressing issues, as well as to grow in godliness in their contexts. In other words, leaders need to be shaped to deal with the challenges of second and third generation churches.

This is a partial description of the “elephant” on and in which African Christian Schools Foundation is involved. This work is not

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<sup>34</sup> Mbiti, p. 8.



just a nice option, like churches that develop camps for their young people or arrange trips for their senior members. This is much more critical. The work of ACSF and entities like it are important for the long-term survival and development of the new churches. Pray for them; lift them up to the Lord. Help to support them financially and with encouragement. They are valuable handmaidens to the churches. The folks who work over on Foster Creighton Dr. in Nashville are like the microbes, doing their detailed work. They, and we who support them, need to see the huge “elephant” with which they are involved.

## Chapter 8

# CONTEMPORARY IDOLATRY: STILL TOO MANY GODS

(Slightly edited article published in *Image*. 24:4  
[July/August, 1996]: 39-40)

In the Summer of 1979 the three of us snaked our way down the valley from Quetzaltenango to Zunil in the Guatemalan highlands. We were trying to locate "San Simon," an idol whose benefits were sought by people from several Central American countries.

Local people always knew where the movable idol was, but we saw no signs to the small hut that housed the "saint." Having found it, we approached the squat hut and were met by two drunken Indians. We moved slowly and cautiously to avoid exciting the people who were milling about the hut. Peering through the small door we could see lighted candles on the dirt floor. One of the men led Roger McCown inside and then assured Gene Luna and me that we were welcome to enter.

"San Simon" was a mannequin dressed in a dark, western suit and new, high-top black shoes. A cap covered his head, sunglasses obscured his eyes, and his lifeless hand held a walking cane with a gold-colored top. His face was white with rosy cheeks, and in his unmoving lips was a small hole that held a smoldering cigarette. Tobacco has been used from ancient times by the Mayan Indians for ritualistic purposes. Several lighted cigarettes were standing on their ends, smoldering like candles.

Around San Simon were gathered two or three other people, and the center of concern was a young woman who was kneeling and holding the hand of the lifeless image. A bath towel was draped around her shoulders, and she seemed agitated. Constant chanting could be heard in the tiny hut whose ceiling was so low that I had to stoop to enter.

We left the hut and walked several yards up the hill where two fires were smoldering. Several people, mostly women, were throwing on the fire flammable incense (small balls of rosin wrapped

in banana leaf), while others constantly moved the coals about with a stick. To the right of the fires were three chairs and a cross, clear evidence of the common Latin American phenomenon known as Christo-paganism—a blending of Christianity and paganism, with paganism usually dominating.

Returning to the hut, we observed that the young woman we'd seen earlier had removed the towel from her back and placed it on the chest of the "saint," whose hand she held while tearfully hugging his lifeless body. McCown could not detect from her mumbling what she was asking or wanting.

Luna and McCown had seen much of this kind of behavior and had wrestled with it constantly. They had seen the liberating effects of the good news, however, as the gospel made a difference among the Indian people. So had I.

As we left the hut I looked at the trees and corn that were caused to grow by the Creator God who gives "rain from heaven and crops in their seasons" (Acts 14:17). I felt like Paul when he saw Athens wholly given to idolatry: "[my] spirit was provoked within [me]" (Acts 17:16). As I lay in bed that night, flashbacks of the idol came to me repeatedly, and I was reminded vividly of Jeremiah's biting diatribe against idolatry and its contrast with the true Creator God (Jer. 10). The burden of my prayer that night was one of thanksgiving for a knowledge of and relationship with the "living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9-10). I was glad someone had taught my family and me the gospel, and I also hurt inwardly for those Indians.

### ***The Gospel Difference***

By the time I arrived in Guatemala the team of the McCowns, Rheinbolts, Hiles, and McCluggages had been there a decade or so. The Lunas had recently joined them. Their work of preaching about the true God and Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior had made a difference among those who believed. Over twenty churches were functioning by then.

One cluster of events will illustrate the difference the gospel made. We met for an evening assembly in a small, dirt-floored house, predictably in the middle of a cornfield. Women sat on one side and men on the other in deference to Guatemalan norms of modesty. All except one elderly man, who said he was too

emotional to take a lead, made comments and led a song. Time and again, McCown whispered to me, the men would say in one way or another, “Isn’t it a happy thing to be a Christian?”

After that meeting one short Indian looked up at me and asked, “Where do you live?” Through McCown I told him, and I am confident McCown had to adjust my rather general response—something like “North America.” The little man smiled. His teeth reminded me of towns in West Texas—few and far between. He proceeded, “Are there any Christians where you live?” I assured him there were many. “When you get back home tell them we love them,” he said joyfully. I thought to myself, “What an absolutely wonderful thing: that little descendant of the once magnificent Mayan empire had learned the characteristic Christian virtue! In that sea of paganism, malnutrition, parasites, and drunkenness people had learned to walk in the light of Christ. How much more ennobling that was than the tearful pleadings before a lifeless mannequin! Thank God for the good news of Jesus Christ and those workers who took that message to people who found light, peace, and joy in Christ.

Polytheism and idolatry still persist worldwide. While the name of Jesus is much more broadly known than that of Mohammed or Buddha, however, much work still has to be done to bring people under the kind reign of God. Pray for, send, and hold up the hands of those who make known the good news.

**Update:** Over forty years later (2011) Roger McCown reported that in those hills of highland Guatemala there are “thousands of Christians,” most of whom have come out of that initial work by the team mentioned in the beginning of this article. Gene Luna and family remained in Guatemala many years to encourage the churches and provide training for their leaders.

## Chapter 9

# RECASTING EVANGELISM FOR NORTH AMERICA

## *Part 1*

*(Slightly edited article first published in Church Growth magazine  
[Houston, TX] 14:3 [3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr., 1999]:10-11.)*

Effective evangelistic methods and strategies are always a product of two things: having a biblical message that connects with people where they are in thought and life, and employing culturally appropriate channels for contacting and teaching people. It is easy to solidify methods and maintain them even when the context in which they were originally developed changes so significantly that the methods no longer work.

During 1996-98 the Japanese Hazama Ando Corporation built a fine bridge across the Choluteca River in Southwestern Honduras. Shortly after it was commissioned for use, hurricane Mitch ravaged much of the infrastructure of the country, including the utter destruction of bridges. The main structure of the Choluteca bridge, however, remained intact, a testimony to Japanese industry. Both roads that approached the bridge were washed away and the course of the river was changed so that the remaining bridge spanned only dry land! It was dubbed “the bridge to nowhere” because it no longer spanned the river nor connected to roads in either direction. There it stood: a monument!

Something like that scenario happens with churches and their various methods and strategies of ministry when the situations for which they were originally developed change drastically. One difference, however, is that the cultural context for churches usually does not change as dramatically and suddenly as by a severe storm. They come more slowly, almost imperceptibly; and that often

blinds church leaders to the need to rethink how they go about their ministry tasks.<sup>35</sup>

When evangelistic approaches are developed for one set of circumstances, and those circumstances change drastically, what should responsible Christians do? The basic gospel message cannot be changed. That is a given. Where people *begin* within the biblical message, however, and how they package it, are factors which may, and should, change. Already in the first century of the Christian era one sees different approaches taken *with the same gospel* when the audiences differed. Paul's approaches to pagans in Lystra (Acts 14:14-18) and Athens (17:22-31) were different from his approaches to fellow Jews (and God-fearers) in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-47) and Thessalonica (17:1-3). Does this suggest anything about rethinking North American evangelism? Of course it does, and the process will need to be repeated in a few decades because all cultures change all the time; and the situation is further complicated when several sub-cultures exist in the same country.

Here I shall identify only two prominent forces which now affect both our culture and many who claim to be Christians. In a second article I will indicate lines along which our evangelism may respond to the forces.

In simple form, here is what has happened on our continent in the last several decades. During the 1960s the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer were popular, and in some of those writings he predicted that the West would move more and more toward secularity. Harvey Cox of Harvard expressed a similar view in *The Secular City*. As a few years passed, their predictions did not come true, at least in the USA. Instead, there has been a rather significant swing toward the spiritual, though not particularly to Christianity. To be sure, there has been a move by many away from what they regard as "institutional Christianity," but many of those same people retain a strong sense of the spiritual. That spirituality is much broader than Christianity, however, since it ranges from rigid monotheism to pantheism. What is new? In the days of the Israelite prophets the Moabites, Ammonites, Babylonians, Egyptians, Baal

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<sup>35</sup> The deceptive nature of gradual social change was captured in the title of George Barna's *Frog in the Kettle: What Christians need to Know about Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990).

devotees, Assyrians, and all others were “spiritual.” Idolaters? Yes, but spiritual, none the less.

Of course, as a part of the mix, there remain those traditional blocks of religious people with whom we may share much but who need to move in more biblical directions, even as we seek to do ourselves: disgruntled mainline Protestants, irritated Evangelicals, and post-Vatican II Roman Catholics. Many of our existing evangelistic approaches have been for these people, and when we encounter them those approaches are still acceptable. What about others, people who no longer fit into those categories of thought, who are no longer concerned about the “right church” or the “plan of salvation” or the “right form of baptism.”

Evangelizing on our continent is very like going to a country with many tribes and feeling the necessity to work with all of them. We are not faced with a singular situation. We have many variables with which to deal: immigrants from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Europe; secularists of various sorts; and a host of hurting people who have grown up with little or no grounding in any sort of religion, but who accept the spiritual as a valid category of thought and life. Our society is now pluralistic, not predominately secular—at least not at the verbal level. In spite of these differences there are still two central ideas which run through many of these groupings.

## **Two Orientations**

1. **Pluralism and relativism.** Pluralism is the acceptance of several “ultimate realities” as equally valid. Although pluralism is argued from varied points of view, it means one thing: “namely, that any notion that a particular ideological or religious claim is intrinsically superior to another is *necessarily* wrong.”<sup>36</sup> So, to pluralists, the Christian way is acceptable for those who hold it to be true, but so are Buddhism, Islam, Shinto, and neo-paganism (like the New Age Movement).

In 1988 Allan Bloom, University of Chicago professor, wrote, *The Closing of the American Mind* in which he stated: “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is

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<sup>36</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996):19.

relative.”<sup>37</sup> Relativism, according to Watkins, is the belief that “truth and error, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly, normal and abnormal, and a host of other judgments are determined by the individual, her circumstances, or her culture.”<sup>38</sup> If everything in the spiritual, moral, or religious realms of thought and life are relative, then of course no one can say one religion or philosophy of life is better than another.

Within American Christianity itself the emphasis on individualism and personal choice has “largely displaced loyalty to denominational structures and to inherited doctrinal bastions,” claims Carson. “This makes it easier for individuals to be syncretistic, or worse, confusedly pluralistic. . .”<sup>39</sup>

This approach to life is a real conspiracy against evangelism because it holds that most people are acceptable as they are. Fundamental to Christian evangelism, however, is the conviction that all people need to turn *from* something to God. Christian evangelizing involves a kind of judgment, and that is an act of intolerance to our society, an act of elitism which many in our culture find abhorrent because it holds that we have no basis for ranking religious groups or ideas. Christians are portrayed as arrogant bigots when they insist that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. But what is new? Is not the whole phenomenon of Christian martyrdom largely a reaction to Christian exclusivism? The rub comes when we seek to make sense to pluralists.

More than we may care to know, this pluralistic approach has influenced the thinking of even church members. Carson sees evidence of it among Evangelicals who, for example, rarely speak of hell, a very biblical subject, and function often at an emotional rather than biblical level. A life that consists largely of self-direction is covered with a thin veneer of religious terminology and practice, while the worldview is markedly non-Christian.

## 2. **Subjectivism.** Pluralism and Relativism are rooted in a

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<sup>37</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008): 25

<sup>38</sup> William D. Watkins, *The New Absolutes* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 23

<sup>39</sup> Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 15-16.



subjective approach to truth and reality. It is common for people to function with two spheres of truth. One is public truth which is subject to scrutiny and verification. Thus, in areas like engineering, chemistry, mathematics, and even history there are right or wrong conclusions. For example, the statement, "Thomas Jefferson was once President of the United States," is a verifiable statement. Its rightness or wrongness is not determined by personal feelings or emotional sensations. Fair enough. Christians have no problem with that. The other areas of thought and concern, however, are regarded as private, internal, and not subject to public scrutiny. At times it is called "My truth." In this sphere, including religious beliefs, one must allow another person as much freedom as possible to determine what is right for her or him. This is prominent in our culture and a significant shift from fifty or a hundred years ago. Fifty year from now responsible Christians will likely find further shifts and thus will need to rethink where they are. Cultures change all the time.

Surveys of attitudes and beliefs verify that a high percentage of North Americans reject the notion of absolute truth in favor of relativism. George Barna, well known pollster, did surveys in 1991, 1993, and 1994 and found an increasing acceptance of relativism in our society. By 1994, he reported that 72% of our population accepted the relativity of truth. Adults born between 1965 and 1983 "rejected absolute truth by a staggering 78 percent."<sup>40</sup> Why do they do that? It has to do with the manner in which people go about determining right and wrong in practically every sphere of life. It is subjective; the individual decides subjectively the course of her or his life.

The broad study by Patterson and Kim, written up in the best-selling book, *The Day America Told the Truth*, yielded results consistent with Barna's research. Patterson and Kim concluded that "Americans are making up their own rules, their own laws. In effect, we're all making up our own moral codes." Only 13% believe in all the ten commands, and 40% believe in only five of those commandments. "We chose which laws of God we believe in. There is absolutely no moral consensus in this country as there was in the 1950s, . . . Today, there is very little respect for the law-- for any

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Carson, *Gagging of God*, 83, 86.

kind of law.”<sup>41</sup> A staggering 93% of the group surveyed declared they, and nobody else, determine what is and what isn’t moral in their lives. Additionally, 84% said they would violate the established rules of their religion, and 81% would violate the civil law, if they thought it was wrong in their view.<sup>42</sup> There you have it: a wholesale rejection of an objective revelation from God as a basis for life and standard of right and wrong, and a corresponding reliance on self, or one’s culture, as the norm. It appears to be a re-run of the period of the Judges, when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25). With that orientation to life it is a moot point whether or not one believes in “god” or “God.”

Evidently this approach to truth, especially religious truth, has been adopted by many people across many church and other group lines. Thus there is a massive swing to the spiritual in our culture, but that spirituality is very elastic and often quite pagan. The basic means of operation in religion, or spirituality, is deeply personal, subjective. That means that when Christians seek to teach the gospel and appeal for people to give themselves to Christ, they are met with a deep resistance. They reject or are highly suspicious of the notion that God has somehow revealed His will objectively and exclusively (in Scripture), and that He does not accept all spiritual expressions. What can we do to out-manuever this evil conspiracy? This is the subject of the next article.

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<sup>41</sup> James Patterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth: What People Really Believe About Everything that Really Matters* (Simon & Schuster, 1992): 28.

<sup>42</sup> Carson, *Gagging*, 94.

# Chapter 10

## RECASTING EVANGELISM IN THE USA

### Part 2

(Slightly edited article first published in *Church Growth*  
[Houston, TX] 14:4 [4<sup>th</sup> Qtr., 1999]:7-9.)

It is no new experience for the church to find itself in a pluralistic situation where people easily believe about anything. That is precisely what the early Christians encountered as the gospel spread from Jerusalem into pagan territory.<sup>43</sup> We can learn much from that encounter,<sup>44</sup> but that is not the purpose here.

It is often a fatal move to respond to a complex situation with an over-simplified approach. No *single* thing needs to be done by the church in its response to our multi-faceted culture. Rather, a more systemic approach is needed. Here I suggest a few internal and external items which are interrelated and calculated to out-manuever current pluralism in the USA. Documentation could be listed for almost every sentence, but the limited references given here are designed to provide leads for those who want to make a difference in our world.

#### **A. Internal Responses**

1. **Vibrant church life.** Many people in the USA, according to several Gallup polls, believe in the true God (though poorly understood), read the Bible, and pray, but do not attend church. They find the churches with which they are acquainted to be unattractive, even irritating. If *believers* find them unpalatable, what

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<sup>43</sup> For details on the wide variety of religions present in the Roman Empire see Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (3<sup>rd</sup>. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2003):165-299

<sup>44</sup> As examples, see Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (rev. ed.; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), ch. 5; E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge: CUP, 1965).

about outsiders?<sup>45</sup> Do we give up on “church” in favor of some individualized Christianity? No! Churchless Christianity is not biblical Christianity.

Churches that make sense to outsiders are warm and joyful, but disciplined by the gospel; they provide support and encouragement for members to live up to their confession by taking seriously the “one another” passages in the New Testament. They have a definite message,<sup>46</sup> hearts of compassion and service, and they strive to support members in their quest for greater God-focused meaning in life. Active Christian compassion (which Christians should do for the glory of God if no one else sees it!) seems to compel the attention of outsiders in the USA. In Thom Rainer’s nationwide study, formerly unchurched people reported that among the six most important attracting items in churches were “people caring for people” (# 2) and “helping the poor” (# 6).<sup>47</sup> Are not those things Christians are supposed to do anyway, *purely because they are Christians*? It is an old story, however, that a winsome Christian life breaks down barriers and serves to open people up to consideration and conversation.

The size of the church is not the critical element. The quality of its visible and biblically oriented life is what matters as the means of compelling the attention of unbelievers. Graham Cole describes “the book of Ruth” method of evangelism, by which he means that unbelievers, especially post-modern oriented people, will likely be attracted first to the people of God (providing they are attractive!) before they are attracted to the God of the people, as Moabite Ruth was with Jewish Naomi and her family.<sup>48</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, initially a Church of Scotland missionary to India, retired and returned to England (1974) after nearly four decades of work and discovered

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<sup>45</sup> See Lee Strobel’s perceptive *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Mary and Harry: How to Reach Friends and Family Who Avoid God and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2010). Strobel was an atheist for 30 years, then became a believer.

<sup>46</sup> Dean M. Kelly, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972).

<sup>47</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach them* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 2009).

<sup>48</sup> Graham Cole, “Proclaiming Christ in Postmodern Times” in *Witness to the World*, edited by David Peterson (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999): 133.

his homeland to be a radically different place from the one he knew when he left for India in 1936. He formed a kind of “think tank” to do in England what he had done in India in an effort to understand the people’s worldview and respond to it. Out of that effort have come several seminal works that help one to understand what is going on in the Euro-American culture area.<sup>49</sup> Newbigin concluded that “the primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”<sup>50</sup> This thesis has enormous implications for all spiritual leaders in local churches.

**2. Clarify the base of operation.** Over against pluralism, the church must make clear that its base of operation is a communication from God, a revelation from above, not human experience. Scripture should be used visibly and prominently to direct life, encourage (1 Thess. 4:18), provide comfort and hope (Rom. 15:4), and the like. In the midst of self-centered religious faith, which is a form of subjectivism, Christians must demonstrate their confidence that “God has spoken” in Jesus Christ and in Scripture,<sup>51</sup> and that what he has spoken is decisive for belief and action. Respect for the written Word of God must be made obvious. Churches that narrow the gap between disciples of Jesus and the pagan world are less and less attractive to the world. A few decades ago Dean Kelly wrote *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*. The evidence he presented revealed that growing churches have a keen sense of who they are, make demands or requirements of members, and have a message that gives people place in the universe. The most recent projections indicate that theologically

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<sup>49</sup> Among these works are *The Open Secret* (1978), *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (1986), *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (1989), and *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (1991).

<sup>50</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1989), 227.

<sup>51</sup> David Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993).

conservative churches are the only ones that have hope of growth.

At times believers may be called upon to give the evidences for their conviction that Scripture can be accounted for best by seeing it as a revelation from God. As with my work in the UK, where apologetics and Christian evidences were a part of personal evangelism, Christians now may need more and more to use those evidences. Many books, videos, and DVDs are available on this subject,<sup>52</sup> and several individuals are available to deal with the most technical issues involved in Christian evidences.

Obviously, to be a Christian in the biblical sense involves trust in and commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord as well as Savior. For Jesus to be Lord, however, is a functional idea; in Scripture lordship involves a relationship with Christ who provides the guidelines by which His followers are to make decisions about money, time, forgiveness, sex, and relationships with parents, children, friends, and marriage companions. In short, it provides a different worldview. The way in which one knows what Christ wants is to be familiar with those documents which are intended to provide for all time the only accounts we have of the person, teachings, and work of Jesus: the New Testament documents. This should not be interpreted as downplaying the Old Testament since it provides much information critically important for the development of the Christian worldview.

I have no statistics on the matter, but it is clear that a number people in the churches of Christ do not really operate by seriously seeking an understanding from Scripture as the base of operation. The Evangelicals are accused of merely playing with the concept,<sup>53</sup> and I fear many of our people do the same. For example, I am thinking of the young couples who were making up their minds about the position of women in the church without taking Scripture

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<sup>52</sup> Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House); Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 2 vols. (Nashville, TN: Nelson); other sources are Warren Christian Apologetics Center (Vienna, WV); Focus Press (Franklin, TN); Apologetics Press (Montgomery, AL); and Does God Exist (South Bend, IN).

<sup>53</sup> See David Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993).

into consideration. Their conversations were punctuated with statements like “I think,” or “I feel,” or “It seems to me.” But no one was really grappling with the biblical teaching about women and their roles in the church. Whenever people make decisions about personal ethics, worship, the church’s work, money, life values, and other things, *without responsible Bible study on those subjects*, they forfeit their right to call themselves a biblical people and throw themselves back on what is merely human. That is all the pluralists have. Their base of operation is something besides the thrust of Scripture. They become subjectivists, relativists.

Over against this, the church must constantly make clear, in a wholesome manner, its biblical base of operation. This calls for appropriate focus in both sermons and Bible classes. I am convinced that if churches do not busy themselves with the written Word of God, and affirm it as the base of operation, they will not out-manuever the cultural conspiracy against evangelism. I know of no other way to counter pluralism and its root, subjectivism, than to affirm clearly and thoughtfully that God has revealed Himself as recorded in Scripture, and that such revelation, which points us to Jesus Christ, is our base of operation. It is imperative that the biblical doctrine of Scripture be given solid attention.

This stance is important for greater reasons than someone’s view of the role of women in the church and worship practices. More fundamentally, it affects the entire worldview out of which Christian people operate; and that is the level at which the spiritual battle is to be pitched. Often unbelievers argue and raise awkward questions, while deep in their hearts they are seeking meaning for life.

### ***B. External Responses***

If the church is to out-manuever the cultural forces which conspire against the gospel, then at least four things need to be done.

1. ***Mobilize rank-and-file.*** Multiple researches in the USA indicate that the vast majority of people who become Christians do so through the efforts of “family and friends.” There is no point in banking on sophisticated print, radio and TV to do what individual Christians are unwilling to do. It does not work. Outsiders will listen to conscientious Christians who live winsome lives and talk about

their faith, even if those Christians cannot give all the answers. They can build bridges between the outsiders and the believers with greater knowledge. Loving, warm, personal interest in non-Christians is powerful, however, and it has been for many generations. Thus, a church will do well to train and motivate even a minority of its members to speak about their faith to outsiders. Nothing in North America substitutes for this deliberate personal effort. Nothing!

**2. *Learn to tell the story-line of Scripture.*** Teaching outsiders absolutely must involve telling the story-line of Scripture since in that story one is teaching a Christian worldview. Already in Genesis one learns about a Creator God who has ethical concerns (chs. 3, 6-7, 11, 18), is the “Judge of all the earth” (18:25), makes covenants, and is both dependable and incredibly long-suffering with human beings. Other books add to the concepts. Crucial concepts like the nature of God, sin, defilement, forgiveness, covenants, promises and the like are picked up in the story-line of Scripture; and eventually the story leads to that loving, cosmic Deliverer who can reshape those who trust in Him.

Jesus is not looking for glib, shallow disciples, but for people who will count the cost before deciding to follow Him (Lk. 9:57-62). Therefore, we must not short-change unbelievers by being what Michael Green calls “gospel shrinkers,” those who reduce the message to John 3:16, “how to become a Christian,” or “what one must do to be saved” initially. Unless those issues are placed in a larger picture, outsiders who convert will likely not last very long. They are cheated. Their worldview must be changed if they are to survive as followers of Jesus. This great need calls for churches constantly to evaluate what it does for new disciples, and what it does in its religious education program. Shepherds owe it to young lambs to nurture them in their early lives.

Even people who are products of mainline Protestantism often have a shabby and warped faith covered with a thin veneer of Bible texts. That must be reshaped if those people are to become valid followers of Jesus and survive spiritually in our culture. People with shallow faith rarely survive cultural persecutions.

One advantage of Jule Miller’s “Visualized Bible Study Series” and Robert Oglesby’s “The Story” (now videos or DVDs) is



that they give the story-line of Scripture. Christians need to learn how to tell that story orally as well. The initial question for most outsiders in the USA is likely not, "How can I get my sins forgiven." Their concern may be more about the meaningfulness of life, the viability of the Christian way of life. The story-line interfaces with that concern.

3. **Message emphases.** That Paul's recorded sermons to Gentiles (Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31) differed from those to Jews (Acts 13:41; 17:1-4) is instructive. Today one must begin at different points with people in different thought positions. It makes little sense to quote John 3:16, worse still Acts 2:38 and Rom. 3:23, to people who know almost nothing about the true God. They need the story-line and emphasis on the viability and sheer power of the Christian way of life. On the other hand, if one is talking with a disconcerted Roman Catholic the concerns will be very different: appropriate authority, Christian fellowship, and meaningful Bible study. A single approach, a one-size-fits-all scheme, will not work in a pluralistic society. Of course, all must eventually come to appreciate the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God, the central act of deliverance, and the way in which one may appropriate the benefits of the Savior whom God has provided. But some do not know they are "lost" in the biblical sense of that word. They hunger but know not why. It is important "to scratch people where they itch," to begin where they are.

4. **Reinforcement.** The majority of the churches I know (which may not be representative) do not have in place an appropriate post-conversion training program. The idea of "catechism" (instruction) arose in the early church partially out of the desire that people with pagan backgrounds understand what they are doing when they take steps to become Christians. Considerable de-programming was necessary over time. So today. Already in the New Testament one sees Paul's returning to churches he had planted, attempting to "strengthen" and "encourage" them (Acts 14:21; 15:41; 16:5). Most of the New Testament documents were designed to strengthen, fortify, protect, and build up Christians. The effort to lead others to Christ must be matched by an effort to strengthen them in their new life-unless one is happy to see them drift away, fall by the wayside, or be overcome by the alien forces in our culture. The local church is responsible for

the welfare of new converts. (On this point, see chapter 2).

The church in the USA today can do at least as well as the earliest church did in teaching the gospel in a pluralistic society and strengthening new converts for vigorous life in fellowship with other Christians. That effort, however, requires a rethinking of the evangelistic agenda and rearranging blocks of biblical materials so that “good news” message is actually perceived.

## Chapter 11

# **“MISSION METHODS:” PRODUCING DURABLE CHURCHES**

(This chapter involves the collapsing of material that was originally in two articles, “Mission Methods” submitted to *Global Harvest* [Winona, MS] and “Producing Durable Churches” submitted to *Journal of Applied Anthropology* [Abilene, TX].)

Consciously or not, everyone who does “missions” or evangelism engages in some kind of methodology. Their approach might be simplistic or very detailed, good or bad; indeed, one may not even be able to describe what he or she does as a matter of routine. Nonetheless, it is there.

Obviously, it is not possible to develop a one-size-fits-all method since among the world’s peoples there are so many differences in languages, value systems, and worldviews. Already in the book of Acts we observe the value of *approaching* Jews one way and Gentiles another. Check out the sermons in Acts for the differences in approaches to Jews and Gentiles, mentioned elsewhere in this book. All sermons end with Jesus, but the beginning points and lines of argument are different for good reasons. In looking over nearly 2000 years of global evangelizing, however, what can be learned about methods from both the New Testament and the experiences of others? Barrett and Reapsome gathered a list of 788 plans for evangelizing the world, an illustration how people have grappled with the question, “How can, or could, or should, or may, or might, or will the world become evangelized by the good news of Jesus Christ?”<sup>54</sup> Many of those plans give little insight about planting durable churches, while others offer useful insight.

Methods vary for many reasons: ecclesiastical differences (Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Orthodox, etc.), past experiences, and different levels of information. The following approach is for

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<sup>54</sup> David B. Barrett and James W. Reapsome, *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World: The rise of a global evangelization movement* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1988): vi.

people who desire to be rooted deeply in Scripture and seek to help people to be “simply Christians” without the use of peculiar names and references to types of church government or geographical distinctions.

### ***A Minimal Framework***

In Chapter 2, I presented the three minimal principles or guidelines I have used meaningfully for many years to summarize what is entailed in global disciple making. Each of these principles, as noted earlier, is capable of much elaboration. That arises from their summary value. The guidelines are the *universalizing of the gospel message*, working for *valid decisions* on the part of the hearers, and *striving for persistence of faith* among those who come to Christ under our teaching/preaching. These three principles are drawn from both Jesus’ directives in Matt. 28:16-20 and other teachings in the New Testament. When Jesus specified “all the nations,” that meant everyone; “make disciples” involves clear teachings by the disciple maker; and “teach them all things” has reference to matters that assist long-term devotion to Christ and growth in His way of life. For many years I have argued from the New Testament, both briefly and in detail, that “making disciples,” which is what Jesus said to do (Matt. 28:19-20), involves these three minimal components. In one sense these components constitute objectives or goals, and clearly defined goals largely dictate careful praying, thinking, and planning methods and procedures to achieve those objectives.

In this chapter I shall enlarge the last of these components, viz., *striving for persistence of faith*. Jesus made it clear that he did not want three-month disciples who would turn back after putting their hands to the plow (Lk. 9:62). As surely as it is imperative for people to *begin* discipleship, it is a matter of life and death that they *continue* in their discipleship (Col. 2:6-7). While individuals will answer for themselves, it is also true that those who plant and water, or who build on the one foundation, must take care how they build (1 Cor. 3:10-15) since their work will be tested. Working for initial converts to Christ is not the end of the process. Paul and his companions went back to previously planted churches in order to “strengthen” (Gr., ἐπιστηρίζων) them (Acts 15:41; 16:5; cf. 14:22; 15:32; 18:23). For that reason “quickie missions,” what James Reapsome called “drive-thru” missions, will not achieve the desired

outcomes. It is to be remembered that every book in the New Testament has for at least one of its purposes that of strengthening, stabilizing, guiding, or protecting the disciples of Jesus. "Equipping the saints" for both ministry and survival is an inherent feature of the overall process of making disciples (Eph. 4:11-16). Did not Jesus model what it meant to make disciples?<sup>55</sup>

Specifics of this process involve a goal of planting culturally meaningful churches that are sustainable before God. This emphasis is over against the 19<sup>th</sup> century underplaying of the church by missionaries that came out of the Enlightenment with their emphasis on winning individuals to Christ, saving souls, the *conversio gentilium*. Indeed, "The nondenominational societies, heavily influenced by the Evangelical Awakenings, had been preaching 'a Gospel without a Church.'"<sup>56</sup> That approach was the result of a well-meaning effort, but one that was devoid of a holistic approach to Scripture and knowledge of the history of missions. Deliberately planting churches in the wake of initial evangelizing has clear precedent in the New Testament, and it is a clear message from the history of missions. K. S. Latourette's writings have demonstrated this to be the case.<sup>57</sup> Isolated Christians rarely survive; the people of God were to function in worshipping, edifying groups as well as individuals. The "one-another" passages in the New Testament point to a part of God's arrangements for the survival and growth of His people. Living together as an ongoing, interacting community of disciples was one way of demonstrating the new life Jesus came to give (John 10:10; cf. John 1:4; Rom. 6:1-11). A necessary part of being (especially long-term) disciple makers is having a good knowledge of biblical ecclesiology, the

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<sup>55</sup> In addition to recent materials on "discipling," one might usefully work through A. B. Bruce's old work, *The Training of the Twelve*, which is occasionally reprinted for its value.

<sup>56</sup> C. S. Carpenter and others quoted in David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Missions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991):331

<sup>57</sup> For a useful summary of several emphases found in his massive, seven-volume work, *The Expansion of Christianity*, see his little work, *The Unquenchable Light* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1948) for his judgment regarding the critical importance of local groups.

biblical doctrine of the church.<sup>58</sup> It is clear in the history of global evangelistic efforts that some churches have been planted as biblical in doctrine and practice, but have been so foreign and strange in their practical operations (matters of judgment, products of ministry decisions) that they are not durable. How can this be avoided? How can churches be so planted and nurtured that they are durable? This task is a huge component of one's "mission methods."

### ***Toward Durable Churches***

Whether churches remain or disappear may be traceable partially to human effort since, even though "God gives the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6), humans "plant and water" (v. 6a). To shift metaphors, as Paul does in the same text, God laid the foundation, Jesus Christ, but men "build on it" (3:10-15). The manner in which they build can produce differing results (vv. 12-15). Accordingly, Paul exhorted, "Let each man take care how he builds" (v. 10b). The focus here, thus, is the divine-human enterprise of building durable churches.

### ***Uncontrollable Factors***

Evangelists/teachers cannot control or influence some factors which historically have caused churches to decline and even disappear. War, economics, and depopulation can force Christians to move to other areas to such an extent that the church is decimated. Persecution can wipe out a church of very committed people. The first wave of Nestorian work in China was completely destroyed by force. In the case of churches of Christ we know of situations in China in the 1930s and North Korea in the 1940s; and in more recent times Beirut, Lebanon and Northern Nigeria.

It is not an ignoble thing for churches to be reduced by death (Rev. 13:14) or economics or famine. It should be of grave concern, however, when the choices made by the church planters and leaders may have a causative relationship to the church's durability or not. These choices are the concern of this article.

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<sup>58</sup> At a responsible level I know of no better source at the moment than Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996).

## ***Important Considerations***

1. ***Careful Instruction and Training.*** I had finished my work in the UK before the NIV translation appeared. One day when reading 2 Timothy 4, I noticed the striking rendering of verse 2. The KJV has “Preach the word . . . with all long-suffering and doctrine.” As a teenager I was puzzled by that wording. The ASV has “all longsuffering and teaching,” while the RSV has “unfailing in patience and teaching.” That was clearer to me. The ESV has “with complete patience and teaching.” The NIV, however, has “with great patience and careful instruction.” I know enough Greek grammar to know these are not bad translations; they just have degrees of clarity. When I read the NIV, however, I felt like putting my hand to my forehead and saying, “That is exactly what it took in London in the 1960s!” Patiently providing clear Christian instruction, striving to impart a biblical worldview, is critical for the survival and development of a church.

From the second century forward, and perhaps even in the first century,<sup>59</sup> many churches conducted oral instruction in preparation for baptism and thus church membership.<sup>60</sup> The instructional sections of the New Testament may have occurred both before and after baptism. Michael Green offered a useful discussion about the teaching on both sides of baptism and the underlying desire to produce durable Christians.<sup>61</sup> Although the catechetical movement had as a major purpose the production of meaningful and persistent membership, it may be questioned whether a Western European catechism, for example, has had that effect in other countries. The same may be said for an established North American agenda of teaching and its effectiveness in drastically different cultures.

In modern times various groups have sought to produce committed and long-term Christians by various discipleship

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<sup>59</sup> Philip Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Catechism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1940).

<sup>60</sup> Colin Buchanan, “Catechism,” *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975):199-201.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970):154ff.

methods which both precede and follow baptism.<sup>62</sup> These programs have had mixed results, depending largely on the extent to which they followed Scripture and the levels of intensity and applications. Effective or not, these methods were developed in efforts to keep people steady in faith, grow in righteousness and ministry, and rise above the common shallowness they observed.

Theoretically, people do not need to decide whether pre- or post-baptismal instruction is more determinative of longevity in Christ since both are called for by the very nature of biblical Christianity. It seems obvious that two blocks of instruction and training are needed for Christians: that body of teaching that every child of God needs to maintain faith (prayer, worship in general, how to benefit from Bible reading, the nature of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, forgiveness, Christian love, and the like); and instruction that will help Christians to remain loyal to Christ against the most pressing issues that tend to compromise the faith. Among Jewish believers there were problems of hypocrisy and legalism (Matthew, James), while among Gentile believers, as at Corinth, there were threats from idolatry, divisiveness, and immorality. Thus, “great patience and careful instruction” are desperately needed in all parts of the world.

The concern here, however, is the way in which various individuals may be serious Christians, nurtured well as individuals, and yet make up a local church which turns out *not* to be viable as a group. Many missionaries have learned the painful lesson that collecting a group of individual believers does not within itself constitute a durable congregation. A former student of mine recounted how a missionary with a large family worked on a South Pacific island. Through his family he developed a sizeable group of Sunday morning attendees, but it was mostly children. Sunday assembly was a lot like a VBS wrap-up. The nose count was impressive, but few adults had been won to Christ and none developed as leaders. When the missionary family left, the group collapsed. Likely some of those young people, especially those who were old enough to make a conscious decision to follow Jesus,

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<sup>62</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1964); Milton Jones, *Discipling—The Multiplying Ministry* (Fort Worth, TX: Star Bible & Tract Corp., 1982); Juan Carlos Ortiz, *Call to Discipleship* (Plainfield, NJ, 1975)



were sincere in their faith and had a good start; but they were a part of a non-viable church. So, what can be done to develop durable churches? Happily, there is a good insight on this subject.

**2. Indigenous, Contextualized.** What is that? The word “indigenous” comes from the Latin, *indigenus* that means “native.” It was simply Anglicized to “indigenous” and still carries the meaning of “produced, growing, or living naturally in a country or climate; native.”<sup>63</sup> The word was long used in biology of plants and animals, but Anderson and Venn seem to have been the first to use the word in reference to churches.<sup>64</sup> In that sense the reference was to churches that worshipped in the local languages, used hymns and songs sung to appropriate local musical tunes, and carried on social life and ministry that connected with local cultures—as contrasted with churches that appeared foreign because they reflected the home culture of the missionaries so much that they confused people and tended not to be rooted in the local culture. In other words, they are the opposite of a British church in Illinois!

This must be taken farther. A viable, durable church must have more than good Bible teaching and a lot of bear-hugging or hand-shaking. Breytenbach has shown through a study of the church at Corinth that a collection of people may exist without having long-term viability.<sup>65</sup> This is one of the big points in chapter 5 in this book. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the terms self-support, self-propagation (extending), and self-governing were developed in an effort to bring about more durable churches. That approach was subjected to several analyses, among them a good one by Beyerhaus.<sup>66</sup> From another angle, Smalley usefully pointed out that a church might participate in the three-self approach and still so

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<sup>63</sup> Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 425.

<sup>64</sup> John Mark Terry, “Indigenous Churches,” p. 483 in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, edited by A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000).

<sup>65</sup> Cilliers Breytenbach, “The Corinthian Church in the First Century A. D.—A Living Church?” *Missionalia* 14:4 (April 1986):3-13.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Beyerhaus, “The Three Selves Formula—Is It Built on Biblical Foundations?” *International Review of Mission* 53 (1964):393-407.

neglect cultural factors that it turns out to be foreign and thus stunted in its efforts.<sup>67</sup>

Because of some of the limitations and applications of the three-self formula, other missiologists have begun to use the word “contextualization” to think through objectives and strategies. Through the years, well before the Protestant era, Roman Catholics grappled with the same situation and used terms like “accommodation,” “adjustment,” and “adaptation.” But “contextualization” is the current buzz word for the subject treated here. Indeed, a short-lived periodical was devoted to this approach,<sup>68</sup> and a very helpful work on the subject has been edited by Hesselgrave and Rommen.<sup>69</sup> More recently Van Rheenen has edited a very useful work along this line.<sup>70</sup> An older work by Hodges is still insightful.<sup>71</sup> This line of approach is more thorough and useful than the three-self formula, though all of these approaches are designed to result in churches that are appropriate to each local area—in short, indigenous and durable. They all have in common the desire to see churches started and developed so they will have longevity and a marked ability to respond biblically to each context.

Allen Tippet, Australian anthropologist who taught long at Fuller Seminary’s School of World Mission, updated the Venn-Anderson three-self formula to a six-fold approach.<sup>72</sup> This is another

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<sup>67</sup> William H. Smalley, “Cultural Implications of an Indigenous Church” *Practical Anthropology* 5:2 (1958):51-65, an article that has been usefully reprinted.

<sup>68</sup> *Gospel in Context*. 1:1 (January 1978) was edited by Charles Taber and published at Milligan College, TN.

<sup>69</sup> David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2003).

<sup>70</sup> Gailyn Van Rheenen, editor, *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006).

<sup>71</sup> Melvin Hodges, *The Indigenous Church* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1976). Billed as “a complete handbook on how to grow young churches,” the procedure described in this work has accounted significantly for the rapid and worldwide spread of the Assemblies of God. Discounting his denominational terminology and Pentecostal theology one may glean many principles that can be employed by churches of Christ. Used copies are available.

<sup>72</sup> Allen R. Tippet, *Verdict Theology in Missionary Theory* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1973).

example of how one expands the details involved in working for durable churches. “(1) Self-image. The church sees itself as being independent from the mission, serving as Christ’s church in its locality. (2) Self-functioning. The church is capable of carrying on all the normal functions of a church—worship, Christian education and so on. (3) Self-determining. This means the church can and does make its own decisions. The local churches do not depend on the mission to make their decisions for them. Tippett echoes Venn in saying that the external mission thrust has to die for the church to be born. It takes ownership of its ministry and life. (4) Self-supporting. The church carries on its own financial burdens and finances its own service projects. (5) Self-propagation. The national church sees itself as responsible for carrying out the great commission. The church gives itself wholeheartedly to evangelism and missions. (6) Self-giving. An indigenous church knows the social needs of its community and endeavors to minister to those needs.”<sup>73</sup> This is a valuable expansion and restatement of the original three-self formula; it is more holistic and useful and can produce churches that are truly indigenous.

3. **Groupness.** Missionaries from Western Europe and North America have been strongly influenced by individualism. This means that, coming out of that cultural context, they must be very sensitive to biblical teachings about the group dimensions of disciple making and church development. The faith presented in the New Testament documents does not contemplate free-floating believers with a purely vertical relationship with God. As surely as one became an authentic follower of Jesus that person became a member of a local group, often referred to as a “church” (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2). Many of the metaphors or images of the church portrayed in the New Testament are of an organism with interrelated parts. By counting the separate Greek words, Minear has counted nearly one hundred images of the church in the New Testament.<sup>74</sup> Several of those images involve group life, like family/household (1Tim. 3:15), body of Christ (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 1:22-23), and brotherhood (1 Pet. 2:17; 5:9; cf. 3:8). The “one another” texts were mentioned earlier. The word translated “one

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<sup>73</sup> Summary given by Terry, “Indigenous Churches,” 484.

<sup>74</sup> Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

another” or “each other” (allēlōn; ἀλλήλων) occurs nearly one hundred times, with about one third of those cases involving relationships between Jesus followers—as in praying for, forgiving, building up, and encouraging one another. That presupposes life together, ongoing relationships.

New disciples often need to be taught how to live together. After the “iron curtain” came down and Westerners could more easily get into the Former Soviet Union, Christian teachers faced several problems in the newly formed churches. The converts had been taught all of their lives to be suspicious of everyone, even family members. One missionary informed me that Russians did not easily greet each other with bear hugs. Indeed, at the Sunday meetings people would often stand alone, looking at others. They had to be taught how to relate in some warm manner with fellow believers. The body image involved different members having the same care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25). Building each other up in love was part of the demonstration of the new kind of life in Christ. Thus, being a Jesus follower was individually contracted—each person had to trust and obey for herself or himself—but once done, those people were to share life.

Thus, there are two levels at which living in local groups, congregations, is important. First, it is one means of demonstrating the life from God, conducted in love and mutuality. God intended for His people Israel so to live that He could display His beauty, or be glorified in them (Isa. 60:21c; 61:3c; cf. Jer. 13:11; Isa. 44:23). He wanted them to be “a light to the nations” (Isa. 49:6; cf. Acts 13:47), but they often disappointed God by failing to carry out their mission as a nation (Ezek. 16:1-58). God now intends for his new covenant people (Jews and Gentiles together), His workmanship (Eph. 2:10), to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called [them] out of darkness” (1 Pet. 2:9-10), to be “to the praise of the glory of his grace (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14), and to display by word and deed the wonders of the Maker of heaven and earth. That is their mission for the glory of God.

Second, at a practical level it is one means provided for the survival and growth of those who turn to Jesus. That is one reason persecuted believers were warned against neglecting their “meeting together” (Heb. 1:25). That was one place where they were to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good

works” (v. 24), and “encouraging one another” (v. 25).<sup>75</sup> These are the chief reasons for making the planting, or formation, of local churches is imperative in the disciple-making process. It is prescribed in Scripture; its vitality is clear from the study of the spread of the Christian faith.

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<sup>75</sup> On the significance of the assembly see Ferguson, *The Church of Christ*, chapter 4.

## Chapter 12

# 700 PLANS TO EVANGELIZE THE WORLD

(Edited version of an article published in the *Gospel Advocate* 131:4 [April 1990]:53-54.)

Recently, within the same week, I received from several publishers notices about studies of churches in their various conditions. They are worthy of reflection.

Church Growth, Inc. of Monrovia, CA sent a catalog of “127 Resources to Help Maximize Your Church’s Ministry.” Many of the books and visual materials listed can doubtless be used in their “unbaptized” state, while others will need to be treated as one eats fish: consume the meat and throw away the bones. Ideas for domestic evangelizing are in abundance.

Another publisher featured David Barrett and James Reapsome’s *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World—The Rise of a Global Evangelization Movement* (New Hope, 1988). A British researcher and an American editor teamed up to provide a fascinating and mind-boggling perspective on past and present efforts to reach the non-Christian world. Some efforts were colossal failures, while others were remarkably successful. Ideas for evangelizing, good and bad, are plentiful. It is fairly obvious that some churches fail to grow, at home and abroad, because they follow, likely unconsciously, well-known patterns of failure and stultification—modes of life almost calculated to defeat effective evangelization. It is easy to rationalize failure by saying, “Well, if people are not interested in the Gospel, I can’t help it,” when in reality their efforts to evangelize never make realistic contact with non-Christians. Obviously, these conditions need to change if a church is serious about transmitting the good news of Jesus Christ.

**Available Knowledge.** The grim fact remains, however, that no church can be excused for its ignorance of good evangelistic techniques. Good information is available. I recall as a teenager reading Ivan Stewart’s *From House to House* and gaining one insight that was worth the price of the book to my personal

evangelism. Some of our brothers and sisters have specialized in putting useful information together in helpful forms. Most of the insights are not difficult to learn; they are not profound or philosophically robust. Research among churches of Christ (e.g., by Dr. Flavil Yeakley, Jr.) and others (e.g., Protestant church-growth studies) turn up quite simple and down-to-earth explanations for growth and decline. The ideas are easy to learn, and the practice of many of them is easily within biblical bounds.

Why, then, do not churches do more effective evangelizing and enjoy more growth, since they can easily learn means of reaching different types of people? Is it willful ignorance? That may be a minor cause but not likely the chief cause.

In the early 1970s the Protestant MARC organization tabulated and published an enormous amount of helpful information about the un-evangelized (unreached) peoples of the world—their sizes, the percentage of Scripture in their language, their chief religious orientation(s), and their general attitude toward Christianity as they knew it. A few years after that document appeared, a friend of mine asked the people at MARC how many churches or missionary societies had committed to evangelizing those groups. “None,” came the embarrassing and regretful reply. MARC decided simply to back up and encourage people to begin praying for unreached peoples of the world. In other words, they came face to face with what was basically a spiritual problem within Protestantism. Is that true for us?

The Protestant/Evangelical situation likely parallels the condition in many churches of Christ. Very few congregations have spent half their budget on evangelizing outside their own territory. One does not see many churches in the USA that are trying hard to evangelize, even with poor methods. The situation is happily somewhat different in places outside the USA, such as sub-Saharan Africa and India; but at home there is currently an appalling lack of effort at overt evangelizing.

**Balance.** A church that spends most of its time correcting others or focusing chiefly on its own need-satisfaction will not likely develop a passion for people “without God, having no hope in the world” (Eph. 2:12). When our cultural way of life threatens our homes, in and out of the church, we fail if we do not respond to

those threats. The early church had to deal with its cultural compulsions toward immorality and idolatry (1Corinthians 6-10). It had to deal with real and threatened persecution (1 Peter; Hebrews; Revelation). It would have failed had it not given a robust response to those threats. When a posture of defense or self-service is the dominant posture of a church, however, it will not be able to reach out significantly beyond itself in transmitting the faith.

It is a question of balance in emphasis. I like the way Irenaeus of Gaul (the late second-century) combined defensive and offensive efforts. On the one hand, he wrote a major refutation of a form of Gnosticism that was threatening the believers (*Against Heresies*), while at the same time he was busily learning the language of the pagans and working for their conversion in and around what is today Lyon, France. The apostle Paul is a good example of that balance. He was an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21; Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:7); he was an apostolic evangelist, but he also used his authority to build up the body (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10).

If revival of meaningful and aggressive evangelistic interest and effort occurs among currently inactive churches, it will likely take place among a praying people who are nurtured on the biblical doctrines of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the nature of mankind, eschatology ("last things"—judgment, vindication, heaven), and salvation/redemption. Evangelizing the lost is not a fad, a tolerated minority interest, or just one "program" in a congregation. Rather, it is to be viewed as participation in God's worldwide work (Col. 1:6, 23) in which He uses the church. The goal should be to teach people the gospel of Christ so that they may come to live "to the praise of the glory of his grace" (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). As "grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God" (2 Cor. 4:15). What a great motive for evangelizing!

We do not always "know in our bones" which methods are best to use with different kinds of people. At modest cost and minimal training, however, we may learn the best insights available for evangelization, both at home and abroad. Since scores of acceptable plans to evangelize are known, the completion of the task will likely turn on the degree of trust people place in our Heavenly Father and His ways.



Elders, preachers, and other teachers in many congregations have their work cut out for them if evangelistic zeal is to be revived. That must be done, however, as surely as people take Jesus Christ seriously. The extent of the church's participation (in whatever way) in global evangelization is one of the sure tests of its conviction that the message about Jesus Christ is for the whole world.

## Chapter 13

# WESTERN AFFLUENCE A CHALLENGE IN GLOBAL EVANGELIZING

(Slightly edited material presented at a regional Missions Resource Network workshop in Little Rock, AR, April 2006.)

Several years ago I was conducting a requested minor evaluation of a work in Guyana. While there, an American evangelist informed me about a national preacher who was drawing two full salaries from two different churches in the USA, one in Florida and the other in Alabama. Neither church knew of the other's support. A year or so later, while attending a workshop on the work in Guyana, I was informed of two additional Guyanese preachers who had done the same thing, "And my church was one of those involved in it," the man said.

This situation is not peculiar to Guyana. Similar incidents are known to have occurred in many countries, involving a variety of churches. Why does this occur? What can be done about it?

### ***I. The affluence of Western churches constitutes a major missionary problem.***

Normally, Christians regard the acquisition of money and property as gifts from God and evidence that He blesses his people. While that is true (Deut. 8:17-18; Hos. 2:8), Scripture also contains many warnings about how people should relate to money and material goods in general. Texts need not be multiplied here. God should be thanked for all kinds of blessings, but the handling of what is placed in one's care (stewardship) can be a challenge. When churches begin to act internationally, crossing culture lines, they can find abundant wealth to be a "missionary problem."

Often there are two pulls in the thinking of Christian leaders who want to see the gospel spread. On the one hand, since most of the money belonging to worldwide churches of Christ is found in their Western churches--chiefly North America and secondarily Western Europe--it seems only right that those sanctified funds be

used to advance the gospel in other parts of the world where money is needed to do the work. It seems only fair and equitable to share with others. From two-thirds to three-quarters of our members may now (2017) be outside the USA, it is likely that 85% to 90% of our wealth is in North America.

On the other hand, the track record of Western funding of "foreign" evangelizing, for both Evangelicals and churches of Christ, is mostly disappointing. This phenomenon prods Western churches to withhold financial help, or at least to be very cautious, even suspicious. The question remains, however, how Western funds may be used so as to *advance* the kingdom of God rather than *retarding* its growth.

***Studies of the subject:*** There is no reason to remain in the dark on this subject since several people have written treatises on the subject, usually reporting on actual situations. A few of these are worth of consideration.

1. Jonathan Bonk, Canadian Mennonite who was brought up in ***Ethiopia*** by missionary parents and subsequently served as a missionary there himself, wrote a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland) on this woolly problem of the use of Western funding.<sup>76</sup> His study was broader than salary support.

2. Russell G. Bell of the churches of Christ, had made over 30 preaching and teaching trips to ***India*** when he wrote his master's thesis at the Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver on this subject.<sup>77</sup> Bell records the colossal blunders and gigantic wastes involved in the thoughtless use of Western money in India. While there are many good and faithful Indian preachers and teachers, the direct

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<sup>76</sup> *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991). A very useful chapter on the subject by Bonk is "Mission and the Problem of Affluence," pp. 295-309 in *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission*, edited by James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993).

<sup>77</sup> Thesis title is "God, Man and Money as it pertains to the Work in India." The published version is *God, Man - Money* (Chennai, India: Timothy Publications, 2001).

support system is fertile soil for spiritually weak, deceitful, and materialistically minded preachers to be dishonest.

3. Both Gerald Paden, former missionary to *Italy* and later teacher at Sunset International Bible Institute, and Charles Cook, another Sunset teacher and long a worker in *India*, have written unpublished position papers on the injudicious use of American dollars to advance evangelism and church development, and how that *direct* support is tragically counter-productive. In all of these studies the stories are very similar and the outcomes are very similar: disappointing.

Issues like these are matters of judgment, not matters of faith. Even when items are matters of prudence and judgments, as many ministry decisions are, those decisions need to be made out of *good* judgment, Christian discernment. The Christian mind should make ministry decisions within a biblical framework of values and goals.<sup>78</sup> Methods should be developed within the boundaries of faith guidelines and in terms of faith objectives. Biblically, we must ask the question, what do we understand that God wants in the long run? In seeking to do that in the use of Western funds, it is important to know that rich sources of information may come from current research and analyses of past efforts (history).

## II. *Select Historic Events*

As one might suspect, these problems have been faced before. One can gain perspective by learning of the experiences of other groups who have been similarly interested in global evangelism.

A. **Henry Venn** (1796-1873) of the British "Church Missionary Society" and **Rufus Anderson** (1796-1880) of the "American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions" both functioned in the mid-nineteenth century. They were Protestant missions leaders who became aware that many of the missions efforts supported by their societies were fragile, dependent, and not

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<sup>78</sup> Paul's discussion of building on the one foundation indicates that "how" one builds will have different outcomes in the welfare of the church (1 Cor. 3:10-17). We are obligated to do the best we can, even in matters of judgment. We have a moral obligation to pray for wisdom (Jas. 1:5; 2:13-18) and be as informed as possible in matters of judgment. God deserves no less.

growing. They isolated several causes for that situation and discovered the use of foreign money was a critical element in the problem, even when managed by a missionary society. Missionaries, supported from abroad, settled into "pastoral" roles without training local churches and leaders to do their own work. They were planting the wrong kind of churches and propping them up with foreign money and personnel. Almost simultaneously Venn and Anderson developed the "three-self" approach to missions work. This is mentioned elsewhere in this book. Their idea was for missionaries to work from the beginning of their efforts to develop churches that are "at home" in the local culture (rather than cultural transplants) with local leaders who could lead the people to support with money and energy the work they wanted and needed to do, and to spread the message of Jesus Christ to both their area and distance places.

In time this formula was referred to as the "three-self" movement. While these components have proven to be very valuable—even to this day—and a responsible attempt to get over gross dependency and fragility, they do not solve all the problems. Indeed, several valuable criticism or refinements of the formula have been offered.<sup>79</sup> It was a major piece of thought, however, in response to procedures that resulted in dependency, spiritual and psychological as well as financial. Of course, the assumption back of this effort was that mission work should not produce churches which would still be dependent on outside sources after a hundred years or more!

**B. John L. Nevius** (1829-1893), American Presbyterian, worked 40 years in China (1853-1893) in various capacities. He knew about the analyses of Venn and Anderson and thought them through in terms of China. He saw the effects of heavily subsidizing Chinese missions efforts and offered healthy criticism. He found to

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<sup>79</sup> These cannot be enumerated here, but see William A. Smalley, "Cultural Implications of an Indigenous Church" in *Practical Anthropology* 5:2 (1958):51-65, and reprinted in *Readings in Missionary Anthropology II* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1978):363-372; Peter Beyerhaus, "The Three Self Formula: Is It Built on Biblical Foundations?" *International Review of Mission* 53 (1964):393-407, reprinted in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, edited by Charles K. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979):

be “easier to be critical than correct,” however, so he developed his own proposals and wrote them up in his *Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*.

In 1890 the Korean Presbyterians asked Nevius and his wife to present messages in Korea on the book. The two stayed only two weeks, but the Koreans decided to implement the plan. As Nevius conceived the three-self approach in a Chinese context it took this form:

1. Christians should continue to live in their neighborhoods and pursue their occupations, being self-supporting and witnessing to their co-workers and neighbors.
2. Missions should only develop programs and institutions that the national church desired and could support.
3. The national churches should call out and support their own pastors/preachers.
4. Churches should be built in the native style with money and materials given by the church members.
5. Intensive biblical and doctrinal instruction should be provided for church leaders every year.

Nevius had already worked in China thirty years and more, but the Presbyterians were just beginning in Korea in 1890 when they invited Nevius to speak to them. They decided to adopt the "Nevius plan." It was six years (1886) before they had their first baptism, but by 1894 they had 236 members; by 1910 they had 30,000 members. That it was not Korea itself that made the difference is demonstrated by the careful comparison in that country of the Presbyterian work with the work of Methodists and others from the beginning until the 1960s. The Presbyterians, though radically divided today, have completely outstripped other groups in growth because of their methodology.<sup>80</sup> They avoided the pitfalls of injudicious use of foreign money.

**C. Roland Allen** (1868-1904), Anglican missionary in China with the "Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts" from 1892-1904, was critical of the subsidy policies of most

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<sup>80</sup> Roy E. Shearer, *Wildfire: Church Growth in Korea* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), chapter 9.

missions in China. Allen also argued for churches which were more indigenous, "owned" and operated by local people. Allen explained his views in two principal books: *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (1912) and *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (1927). The main points he made were these:

1. "All permanent teaching must be intelligible and easily understood that those who receive it can retain it, use it, and pass it on."
2. "All organizations should be set up in a way that national Christians can maintain them."
3. "Church finances should be provided and controlled by the local church members."
4. "Christians should be taught to provide pastoral care for each other."
5. "Missionaries should give national believers the authority to exercise spiritual gifts freely and at once."

D. **Melvin Hodges** (1909-1986), former missionary and later mission administrator for the Assemblies of God, wrote his widely used *The Indigenous Church* in 1953. He gave to his church popular expression of the work of Venn, Anderson, Nevius, and Allen. Hodges acknowledged the difficulty involved in moving from a subsidy approach to an indigenous approach, but he argued that it needed to be done. The Assemblies of God did accept it, and largely as a result of that, those churches have grown rapidly throughout the world, producing self-sustaining churches.

E. **Alan Tippett** (1911-1988), Australian anthropologist of Fuller's School of World Missions and Church Growth and Methodist missionary to the South Pacific, refined the previous views in his *Verdict Theology in Missionary Theory*.<sup>81</sup> Tippett argued that while the three-self approach is valid, it is incomplete. Coming out of his academic background in anthropology and his considerable missionary experience, Tippett proposed six components of developing stable churches. (See the list in Chapter 11 of this book.)

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<sup>81</sup> South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1973. Pages 148ff.

Looking over these five cases, spread as they are over more than a century, one notices that although there some variations in these formulations, they all have certain things in common. (a) The subsidy approach, as a rule, has demonstrably failed over time to produce both stable churches and locally generated evangelism. (b) Financial support from outside, unless handled very carefully, is normally translated into spiritual anemia; the local church does not take ownership of the work. (c) Over the long haul, they feel churches will grow more spiritually and numerically if they learn to support their own work, both financially and with their own human resources.

### **III. Are Churches of Christ Different?**

If one wants to argue that the outcomes might be different in churches of Christ since we differ from these Protestant groups in some serious respects, then it is important to note our own history of using foreign funding.

A. In ***post-World War II Germany*** many church buildings were built with American funds. Usually, the Germans were not asked where the buildings should be located or what they should look like. The Americans, with the best of intentions, provided the money and the decisions. An elder of the Broadway church in Lubbock, TX told me in the mid-1960s that after twenty-five years, one of those congregations did not give enough money to pay the utility bill for the building, and that another church wrote to Broadway, asking for enough money to replace the sign which had fallen down in front of the building--and *that in Germany* where, even then, they had one of the three strongest economies in the world! The culturally aggressive and enterprising Germans were taught, inadvertently of course, to be dependent. Bill McDonough helped to sell two of those buildings. Another was sold to the adjoining University of Frankfurt. On the other hand, Jack McKinney worked to plant and develop a self-supporting and self-directing congregation in Zurich, Switzerland which is still going, and even reaching out beyond itself.

B. ***Richard Chowning, Gailyn Van Rheenen, Fielden Allison*** and a few others worked some fifteen years among the Kipsigis of ***Kenya***. They trained the new converts to develop plans and fund their own buildings and ministries. No preachers were put



on foreign salary. Elders were developed in several of the 130 or so churches begun during that time. Of course, indigenous financial support alone did not do the trick. They had a vigorous program of evangelism and post-baptismal training; they conducted leadership training programs.

C. The various programs of making converts, sending them to various types of schools within the country, and then routinely putting them on foreign salary just has not worked! In the 1950s the practice was abandoned in eastern **Nigeria** because of its "fruits."<sup>82</sup> At one point a school in the **Caribbean** graduated some 62 students from a preachers' training school and put them on American support. After five years or so American churches began to withdraw support in hopes the local churches would pick up that support. It didn't happen. When evaluated several years later, none of the men were preaching, only two were still in the church, and church growth was minimal.<sup>83</sup> These stories are numerous, in one form or another.

D. In the **Highlands of Guatemala** a team of four couples, one a medical doctor and his wife, worked a dozen or so years (late 1960s into the early 1980s), planting and stabilizing churches. They conducted Leadership Training by Extension classes with the Indians. None of them were put on foreign financial support. The churches are still going and multiplying on their own. By contrast, the Presbyterians from North America started a seminary in Guatemala City to educate their pastors. After a decade and more they had produced only one or two pastors, none whom went back into the Highlands. That is when Ralph Winter conceived the idea of Theological Education by Extension, of leaving church leaders in their churches and taking education to them.<sup>84</sup> Note incidentally, missionaries of churches of Christ have followed both approaches, as have Evangelicals, and both groups have experienced the same set of outcomes.

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<sup>82</sup> Wendell Broom, who worked with the school and handled salary funds, said his relationships with the local workers was changed when he became the "paymaster." The financial scheme failed.

<sup>83</sup> Research on this school was done by Dr. Ed Matthews of Abilene Christian University.

<sup>84</sup> This story was told many times by Dr. Ralph Winter.

## IV Conclusions from these Studies

The informed verdict from the past is that, *as a rule*, DO NOT PUT NATIONALS IN THEIR COUNTRIES ON DIRECT SUPPORT FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY! The operative word here is “direct” because there are circumstances under which sanctified money from the West may serve good kingdom purposes. Here are the details, however, about the negative effects of direct salary support.

Here I am drawing from many brothers (Gerald Paden, Charles Cook, Wendell Broom, and many others; plus my own observations) to make this detailed list of the disadvantages and demerits of putting national preachers on direct salary from churches in other countries. The case is the same whether preachers in Africa, Papua New Guinea, Latin America or India are supported by churches in Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, or North America. When the preacher is culturally and geographically separated from his supporters it is easy for the maladies to occur that have been so frequent in the past. The following list is really a report from history, both ours and others’.

1. **Cultural differences** usually mean there are poor understandings of each other on the front end. The supporting church expects—but often does not express it—the national preacher to develop a good, stable church that eventually can continue on its own. Usually no mention is made of how long the support will last, and the national preacher will often assume (wishful thinking?) the arrangement to be permanent or indefinite. When support is eventually withdrawn, even gradually, the outcomes are very negative.

2. **Faulty worker selection.** At times a church begins supporting a man to do the work of a preacher when it does not have sufficient evidence he can do what is expected of him. It is one thing to be able to give a few good sermons; it is another thing altogether to be able to develop a congregation and leaders. This is built-in failure for the preacher and disappointment for the supporters.

3. Often the **support level** is too high and the preacher is alienated from the very people he is there to serve. He is spoiled and at times viewed as doing his work because he is paid handsomely by foreigners to do so. These stories are legion.

4. Another salary abuse occurs when preachers are at times ***supported so meagerly*** that their families suffer. These men may be genuine servants of God, and they just will not ask for more support lest they jeopardize their position. The supporting church is often insensitive to the man's real needs, and both he and his family suffer.

5. The foreign supported preacher rarely develops responsible ***leaders*** in his congregation or in his area. Several things may account for this. He may not want to develop people who can do what he is doing lest he lose his position and support. It may be an ego trip; he may enjoy the position of prominence (perceived as the "pastor") in the church. He may not know how to develop leaders at the informal level, even if he is disposed to do so. Do national preachers in the USA know how to develop leaders just because they are nationals?

6. The preacher has no local ***accountability*** since he feels he is answerable to the church that pays his salary rather than the local church. He becomes a "little lord" in the church; no one dares to cross him since he is the preacher, the leader, and the source of financial benefits to the church. This position often leads to numerous other problems.<sup>85</sup>

7. Foreign support tends to bring out the worst in the national preacher. It can ***tempt him to falsify about the amount of his work***. He may be lazy, or at least wants to appear busier than he is. He may falsify about the *results* of his work. He may not know how to do what is expected of him. National preachers do not automatically know how to grow and develop churches any more than preachers in the USA or Canada know how to do so just because they are nationals.

8. Usually the distant supporters *know very little details* of the man's work. That is partially the worker's fault and partially the supporters' fault for not making visits or otherwise gathering information about the work. The geographic distance between the two is a hindrance.

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<sup>85</sup> See Russel Bell, *God – Man – Money* (Chennai, India: Timothy Publications, 2001) for the "big man" syndrome in India.

9. Related to # 3 above, **jealousy** arises and complicates relationships when national workers receive different levels of support from abroad.

10. Often, when the supporting church decides to withdraw its support, no matter what the explanation, the **national becomes bitter, quits preaching**, and at times ceases to function as a Christian.

11. The preacher is often **perpetually worried** about the uncertainty of his support, even though he would like to believe it to be permanent. A worried preacher does not do his best. He is often tempted, as stated above, to falsify about his work and its results in order to assure continuation of his support.

12. It tends to have very **negative influences on the development of the national church**. It is very exceptional for the national church to thrive and grow when its preacher is supported directly from another country. Here are some of the common negative outcomes: The church rarely becomes evangelistic itself. New converts seem rarely to be developed. The church tends to adopt a "laity" mentality since the foreign-supported preacher often functions or is perceived as the pastor who guides everything. Leadership development is stifled. The church is robbed of its potential initiative. Should the preacher be cut off, the congregation feels orphaned.

**Observations on this list:** It is clear that other religious groups, especially individual churches, have the same experiences with affluence as churches of Christ. Further, in many cases, these outcomes are found when missionary societies support national preachers. When George Benson was a missionary in China he heard of a "flourishing" work by a Baptist missionary in the interior of the country. With a travel compassion, Benson, ever a learner, traveled by bus and boat to the interior only to find all of those native workers were on American salary. Benson turned around and went back to Canton. He knew what the long-range outcome of that "flourishing work" would be. It is to be remembered that the "Three-Self" movement was developed by two men who were head of

Protestant missionary societies, one British and one American.<sup>86</sup> Much of the problem arises from a failure on the part of financial supporters to understand the missions process—what it takes to win people to Christ and weld them into maturing congregations.

Since most of the money among Evangelicals and churches of Christ is found in the West, insofar as money is often involved in carrying out several phases of global disciple-making, one wonders whether there are ways in which that money can be stewarded that will have positive effects rather than negative ones. This must be considered.

### ***V. The Judicious Uses of Western Funds***

In addition to aggressive work by tentmakers, there are still situations in which financial support is needed for church planters and developers in new territories. Further, funding for advance-level training of leaders and teachers is still needed to enable churches move beyond their neophyte stages. Those workers should avoid displays of affluence as much as possible. Western workers need to know from the beginning about the life-style problems of using Western funds in their work.

Funding from the West for schools (of all sorts), clinics and other medical services, agricultural training programs, mass media work (radio, TV and printing of literature), and the like, does not seem to produce dependent *churches* in those areas if the situations are properly managed. Those services should be regarded chiefly as benevolent works or Christian service, often with evangelistic components, and they tend to attract local people who want well-paying jobs with them.

It is often wise operationally to separate in some way the churches from the benevolent entities because the compassionate services can detract from the effort to develop responsible churches with their own initiative. While rural churches should be able to fund their own work, buildings and all, from the start, that is not true in most urban areas. In some cases, as illustrated in Brazil, there can be a good case made for funding the building of a sizeable building

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<sup>86</sup> See various articles and books by and about Rufus Anderson (USA) and Henry Venn (British).

in a large city as a meeting place for lectureships and workshops that serve multiple congregations. Further, it is conceivable that limited assistance (i.e., do not rob it of its initiative!) may be given to an urban church as it starts up, and then teach it to plant other churches and assist them.

The big question is: Does this use of external money produce financial, emotional, and spiritual dependence in the receiving church? In some cases interest-free loans have enabled churches to do what would otherwise be impossible, and the repayment of the loan is training in responsibility. The same principle operates among churches within the same country. It is noble for a church to be generous, but when the generosity is undisciplined and lavish it can “spoil” a church much as such action by a wealthy family can “spoil” a child.

It is conceivable that money from the West can help to support national evangelists as *evangelists*. It is one thing to support the preacher in an existing church, as is done “back home;” but it is another matter to support a man who goes from one place to another as a cutting-edge evangelist, a church planter. Even in this case, however, wisdom must be used. As long as the man is effective in producing churches that can stand on their own and then move on to plant another church and another, the possibilities of negative effects will be reduced.

Several factors need to be computed in such an arrangement. First, his salary scale needs to be culturally appropriate. He does not live at a level that distances him from those whom he should serve. Second, assurances need to be made that his support will continue as long as he does the work agreed upon by both parties, but cease when he ceases to do that work. Third, it is ideal for him to be answerable to a good local church (if one is available). This can be a key factor in the success of such a venture, and it is a practical reason for giving attention to the development of churches. Fourth, there is the long-range concern about life after work. If a man’s work life has been supported by foreign funds, how will he live once he is no longer able to evangelize? In trying to solve this challenge it is most important to work with a responsible national church rather than making culturally ignorant decisions from a point 4,000 miles away.

## Conclusion

This material is first a warning about a very common but unfruitful practice of putting (often) novice workers on salary from another country. Both large and small churches, even individuals, are tempted to do it. The evidence is abundant and clear that great caution should be used.

There may be some circumstances in which funds from one country may be used for salary purposes and Christian services in another country with good results, but such practices must be circumscribed by a number of provisions and conditions. Remember, “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10); it will corrupt abroad as it does at home. The North Boulevard church (Murfreesboro, TN) engaged in a five-year experiment of partnership with a church in Accra, Ghana for the evangelization of nearby Mali in West Africa. The Accra elders, already experienced in sending out workers, were asked to select the workers, set their salary scales, supervise them, and evaluate their; while North Boulevard would furnish the funds, pray for the work, and participate in some phases of evaluation. The approach was designed to circumvent many of the inherent problems involved in the process. After 15+ years of that work, the progress is encouraging in a predominately Muslim country.<sup>87</sup>

It is much wiser but often harder to follow well-established methods that are calculated to produce both congregations and individuals who love God and want to serve Him, using their own resources, ingenuity, and talents. Often the big offenders in misusing Western money are traveling individuals who mean well in making promises of support. They need to be taught. Stewardship is a serious business for both churches and individual Christians.

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<sup>87</sup> See for a details description C. Philip Slate, “Partnership for Evangelizing in Mali,” *missiodeijournal.com/issues/md-6-2/authors/md-6-2-slate*.

## Chapter 14

# IMPERATIVE! SELF-SUPPORTED EVANGELIZERS

(Originally published under this title in *Gospel Advocate*  
CXXI:37 [6 Dec. 1979]:742, 757.)

Several years ago a *Missionary Directory* was produced by the Webb Chapel church of Christ in Dallas, TX. Among the four hundred or so "missionary families" listed in that directory were five entries for Saudi Arabia. There one finds Medina and Mecca; there it is 99% Muslim, and neither Jews nor Christian missionaries/preachers were allowed entry.

How, then, did those five Christian families get in? In one way or another they seem to have been associated with the petroleum industry. Their occupations had taken them where it is unlikely that a "missionary" could be smuggled into the country in a steamer trunk--assuming one would want to do so! I do not know what kind of Christian work those families were able to render, if any at all, in Saudi Arabia, but there was something both ominous and delightful about their being there.<sup>88</sup>

### **Clouds?**

While there are still many countries which will allow the fulltime teacher/ preacher/ missionary to live and work, three kinds of doors are closed to missionaries in others. **Political** doors make it difficult or impossible for evangelists to get visas, as in Saudi Arabia and other Muslim and several secular countries. **Psychological** doors may be closed when for a variety of reasons people do not welcome "foreign missionaries" to work among them, even when their governments allows it. At one point Jesus sent the apostle

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<sup>88</sup> Several years later nearly one hundred members of churches of Christ were in Yeda, Saudi Arabia, and Evertt R. Huffard used to visit them from Jordan periodically to encourage them.



Paul away from Jerusalem, “far away to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21). Why? Because the Jerusalem Jews regarded Paul as a “turncoat.” Thus, Jesus said, “they will not accept *your* testimony about me” (v. 18). They might have listened to others, but for psychological and theological reasons they would not listen to Paul. Similarly, white Europeans are not as welcome or effective as black Africans in some places. In other cases ***economical*** doors are closing, making it difficult to sustain North American families in some Western European and Asian countries, where their salary structures and currency strengths against foreign money may be great. These closed or closing doors create what are called “limited access” countries. Those doors may re-open in time (as with the former Soviet Union and parts of Southeast Asia), but where barriers to outside workers exist they must be dealt with wisely.

Usually all three doors are not closed at the same time, but when any one of them is closed there needs to be vigorous thinking and constant prayer in an effort to outflank opposition to disciple-making activities. While generally there seems to be a need for at least a few full-time, salaried workers with permanent visas, there are alternatives to that arrangement. Developing such alternatives is wise and necessary when any of the three doors is closed.

### ***Silver Linings?***

When political doors are closed, or barely open, meaningful short-term evangelistic work and training are options, providing they are well-planned and culturally relevant. Again, Christians may go in capacities other than as formal missionaries. When both political and psychological doors were closed in Afghanistan, J. Christy Wilson and friends went as teachers of English and at first, because of a hostile government, could do no more than pray for the students. But with time the situation changed because those English teachers were present and active.<sup>89</sup> At times

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<sup>89</sup> On this subject see J. Christy Wilson, Jr., *Today's Tentmakers: Self-support: An Alternative model for worldwide witness* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1979). Still a valuable work on various aspects of self-supported workers.

*psychological* doors are more open to teachers, government workers, and other employees than to those perceived as "missionaries." When *economic* barriers exist, people may go in a self-supporting capacity, like those families in Saudi Arabia.

While North American churches have sufficient money to send more workers, there can be distinct advantages in people's going in a self-supporting capacity (e.g., greater number of workers, broader exposure of peoples to the gospel, broader dimensions of teaching, etc.). Danker provided illuminating examples of how a church (Moravians) and a missionary society (Basel Mission Trading Company) utilized the self-supporting and commercial enterprise principle both (1) to increase the number of workers abroad and (2) to operate on many fronts.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, both early Christianity and contemporary Islam illustrate how religions can spread along trade routes, when its devotees cannot keep quiet about their faith. What the Nestorians (5<sup>th</sup> century forward) and Moravians (18<sup>th</sup> century forward) did as self-supported workers is astonishing.

There are several conditions (too numerous to detail here) which argue for an intensification of evangelistic efforts by full-time Christians who support themselves. The task of global evangelizing cannot be accomplished without their work. As Danker's study indicates, however, these unique opportunities have unique problems.

### ***Storm Management***

Christians who move, willingly or not, within or outside their home land, have natural opportunities to evangelize neglected areas.<sup>91</sup> When culture lines are crossed, even within one's home land, emotional jolts (or even culture shock) may be experienced by self-supported workers as well as by church-supported workers. Where cultural

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<sup>90</sup> William Danker, *Profit for the Lord: Economic Activities in Moravian Missions and the Basel Mission Trading Company* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1971).

<sup>91</sup> See the chapter in this work on evangelistic work done by Christian employees of the DuPont company who were sent from Tennessee to various parts of the USA.

adjustments are not made, the workers will be neither happy nor fully successful in their work. Many Southern preachers have not been accepted at time by Northerners within the USA because they failed to make a few adjustments. Workers have gone from Alabama to Florida and from Texas to the Upper Mid-West but "returned home" for the same reasons. Self-supported workers need not think their financial independence makes them immune to emotional jolts or rejection by local people. They need to make adjustments as much as full-time workers.

A few years ago a military family arrived in a Western European country with a reasonably good idea about what to do in local evangelization. Background? They had gone through an intensive week-end seminar sponsored by a local church in a Western State and taught by Wendell Broom. Such seminars, reading lists, summer courses and the like can help to prepare the quite large number of Christians who are or can be "on the move" to the four corners of the earth.<sup>92</sup>

While many are sent by their employers, others may select a job which takes them abroad. Often there are university teaching positions available in several countries. An extraordinarily large number of positions have been open for teaching English, especially in Asian countries. There are entire books on and frequent listings in select magazines of employment opportunities abroad. People in those positions will be thrown into natural contact with people full-time workers may never meet. I recall standing in front of the Tien Mu church building in Taipei, seeing a tall thin man and a short Chinese woman walking toward the building. It would have been a comical sight were it not so serious: he was a North American working for IBM; she was a worker in his office. It was natural contact, and the man was building a bridge for the woman to local Christians.

What I am arguing here is that there are numerous opportunities for dedicated Christians to go in a self-

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<sup>92</sup> A useful work along this line is Jonathan Lewis, ed., *Working Your Way to the Nations: A Guide to Effective Tentmaking* (2nd ed.; Intervarsity Press, 1996).

supported capacity to places where economics, politics, or local attitudes make it difficult for the "missionary" or full-time "preacher" to go. Numerous conditions indicate that this dimension of spreading the gospel must be stepped up if we are to be aggressive in world-wide evangelization. Those who go in these-capacities, however, deserve to be acquainted with the variables which enable them to live meaningfully in another culture and do work which lasts.

Whenever you hear of people's moving, encourage them to use their stewardships. Remember the case of those five families in Saudi Arabia. As far as we know they were all oil-related personnel and their families, who most likely worshipped and served as quite usual Christians before going.

## Chapter 15

# THE DECEIVING NATURE OF ADAPTATION IN E-1 SITUATIONS

(Slightly edited version of an article published in the *Journal of Applied Missiology*. 3:2 [Oct.1992]:6-14.)

A person with only elementary knowledge of different cultures will correctly perceive that it is more difficult to live and work in some cultures than in others. As early as 1975 Ralph Winter described the enterprise of evangelizing at different cultural distances by using the symbols E-1, E-2, and E-3.<sup>93</sup> By this scheme E-1 evangelization takes place when one works in a culture similar to his or her own in language and general cultural experience, while E-3 work takes place where the cross-cultural worker's host culture is radically different from his or her native land.

Similarly, Hesselgrave developed a more detailed means of computing cultural distance.<sup>94</sup> His scheme involved a ten-point scale on seven crucial items, including linguistic forms, social structure, and worldview. Thus, a higher total number on the seventy-point scheme would indicate the need of greater effort and more time in preparation, personal identification, and adequate task performance. Forewarned about the drastic cultural differences in an E-3 field of work, the informed Christian worker determines to be flexible and empathetic, seeking to understand and accept as valid the basic alternative ways of thinking and acting in the new culture. Ordinarily, it is useful to understand on the front end of one's work that several years of diligent effort will pass before the missionary feels "at home" in a distant culture and is able to perform his or her tasks with some degree of adequacy. For Christian workers, cultural distance is more important than geographic distance.

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<sup>93</sup> Ralph D. Winter, "The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism" in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* edited by J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis, MN: World-Wide Publications, 1975):213-225.

<sup>94</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1978):101-105.

For a variety of reasons, however, one may choose to evangelize in what Winter called E-1 situations. In such cases a person is prone to accent cultural similarities and minimize cultural differences, especially at the physical level—as when a Spanish priest goes to Mexico to work, or an Englishman to Australia. Consequently, one tends in those cases to reduce efforts at identification, especially at the psychological level. The results may be as negative and disappointing as the failure to adjust in E-3 situations. This article addresses the deceiving nature of evangelizing in close-culture situations.

### ***E-1 Opportunities***

Evangelists often have an opportunity to move about in one or more E-1 situations. The most obvious indicator of similarity is language. Thus, Brazilians can go to Portugal, Spaniards to various South and Central American countries, and Swahili-speaking Africans to several countries and find similarities. Geographically separated English-speaking countries like Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the U.S.A. are E-1 situations for those who are cradled in any one of those countries and later move to another for work. However, English-speaking countries such as Singapore, India, and Nigeria belong to a different class since other cultural differences override the commonality in language.

External similarities such as language, food, levels of technology, and housing are more obvious. Most popular discussions of cultural differences seem to center on the physical elements. Psychological factors are admitted, but on world-scale the E-1 situations appear so familiar that one is deceived into thinking that little effort is needed by the disciple-maker to adapt to them. Neill recorded that when Archibald Fleming, Anglican missionary to the Arctic region of North America, spent his first winter with two Eskimo families in an igloo, he quoted favorably the words of Commander Perry: “A night in one of those igloos, with a family at home, is an offense to every civilized sense”.<sup>95</sup> Nothing approaching that is the norm in E-1 situations. Often the differences between cultures in E-1 situations are similar to the regional differences one may find in

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<sup>95</sup> Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*. The Pelican History of the Church: 6 (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin Books, 1964):392.

one's own country. So why exert a great effort in adaptation? Why not get into the work as soon as possible?

### ***The Setback of Partial Adaptation***

At least two factors are at stake in adaptation to another culture: *effectiveness* of work and personal *longevity*. In 1960 Cleveland, Mangone, and Adams reported that training and cultural sensitivity increased task performance and promoted greater longevity on the field than would be found among those without such training.<sup>96</sup> Either or both of these factors may be seriously frustrated through the failure to adapt in E-1 situations.

There are numerous cases of missionaries who are miserable in E-1 situations despite external similarities to their home culture. Such unhappiness cuts short the period of work in the second country, and potentially good workers have themselves to thank for the outcome of their fatal assumptions about non-adaptation or minimal adaptation/adjustment in near-culture situations.

It is certainly true that people may live fairly happily for many years in a second culture by surrounding themselves with trappings of their home culture. If their task is to work with local people, however, they will be defeated by such arrangements. This very scenario provoked Lederer and Burdick to write *The Ugly American*, a book still worth reading. If cross-cultural evangelists are not eventually accepted by the nationals in the host culture, their work will be severely limited. A low-credibility bearer of a good message is frustrating to the intended recipients of his or her message.

Anthropologist E. T. Hall observed that the only time the famous defense lawyer, Clarence Darrow, decisively lost a case was in 1932 in Honolulu, where he did not know how to appeal to the "formal systems" of his oriental jurors.<sup>97</sup> "Formal systems" is the crucial term here; largely psychological, it is freighted with implications for identification and adaptation. Perhaps more than the physical elements, the psychological factors determine acceptance

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<sup>96</sup> Harland Cleveland, Gerard J. Mangone, and John C. Adams, *The Overseas Americans* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1960).

<sup>97</sup> Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1959):75.

in E-1 situations. In fact, artificial physical identification without psychological identification has earned the pejorative classification of "going native."<sup>98</sup>

Roman Catholic missionary anthropologist Louis Luzbetak illustrates the matter well. When he inquired about the problem of missionary adjustment in Mexico, several bishops and religious superiors remarked,

You North Americans are generally well disposed when you come to our country as missionaries; at least, you want to be "de-Yankeezed" whether you succeed or not. The trouble is that your culture is so different from ours that North American missionaries have a tough job ahead of them. But they can learn our ways. It is quite different with the Spaniards. The Spaniards come from a background similar to ours, but just because their way of life is so similar to ours they imagine that there is no difference at all between Spain and Mexico, and consequently they never really learn to know us.<sup>99</sup>

Cultural understanding and respect are always necessary, even in E-1 situations where one may wrongly assume a similarity that does not exist at the formal systems level. It is a horrible handicap to pursue work among people who feel you do not know and respect them.

Lynn Anderson's 1965 M. A. research indicated that many U.S. preachers with the churches of Christ were not really accepted in English-speaking Canada because they failed to negotiate the adjustments at the "formal systems" level. Language, automobiles, houses, and food were largely the same for U. S. citizens and Canadians; but nationalistic feelings, matters of etiquette, and task orientations were different.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, an English preacher informed me in the late 1960s that "at least half of the American preachers who come to England with churches of Christ are not accepted." Where that is the case, one's effectiveness will be

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<sup>98</sup> Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: An Applied Anthropology for the Religious Workers* (Techny, IL: Divine Word Publications, 1963).

<sup>99</sup> Luzbetak, *Church and Cultures*, 70.

<sup>100</sup> Lynn Anderson, *An American Preacher in A Canadian Situation: A Study in Cross-Cultural Communication*. Unpublished M. A. Thesis, Harding Graduate School of Religion, 1965.



seriously hampered. Winston Churchill's quip that "Britain and America are two great nations separated only by a common language," is a gross cultural overstatement since he used the word "only"; but his basic point is correct. According to George Bernard Shaw, as portrayed in the movie *My Fair Lady*, "English has not been spoken in America for years!" Even though there is enough language commonality for initial communication, however, other differences are very telling. As a part of her contribution to the war effort, American anthropologist Margaret Mead wrote several booklets and articles designed to help British and American peoples, troops included, to understand each other as allies in the 1940s.<sup>101</sup> Many of those works would have been helpful to this writer before going to the British Isles as late as 1961. The formal systems are different enough even in culturally similar countries to cause a religious worker to be rejected or have his or her effectiveness reduced by the lack of attention to those differences.

A Brazilian going to work in E-1 Portugal will be faced with the same variables. A Honduran going to Bolivia or an Argentine going to Chile will face numerous formal systems differences. Language is only one dimension of a culture, and sharing a language may deceive one into thinking few adjustments need to be made otherwise.

Even when a North American goes from Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, or Texas to work in Minnesota, Wisconsin, or one of the Dakotas, an unwillingness to make adjustments will hinder one's work. A Southerner will not be accepted if his notion of a church fellowship in the northern States is to eat KFC and cheer for the Dallas Cowboys. When students from the North describe themselves as having "culture shock" as a result of moving South for their college or university education, it should be obvious that

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<sup>101</sup> Margaret Mead, "When Do Americans Fight? *Nation* 155:16 (17 October 1942):368-71; "Can You Tell One American from Another?" *The Listener* 30:777 (2 December 1943):640; "What Makes Americans Tick?" *Vogue* (1 Feb. 1943):114-15; "A GI View of Britain," *The New York Times Magazine* (9 April 1944):14, 40; "What Is A Date?" *Transatlantic*, No.10 (January, 1944):54, 57-60; "The English as A Foreigner Sees Them," *The Listener*, 38:973 (18 Sept. 1947):475-76.

Southerners who go North to evangelize will find enough differences to make adjustments necessary.

A further complication is that close-culture, E-1 situations, may attract workers who are unwilling to make “those drastic changes” involved in traveling a greater culture distance. In other words, they may tend to be people who study little missiology and are personally inflexible. Thus, they put forth little effort to adjust to differences, perhaps with good motives, and the result is a short period of essentially poor work, disappointing to them and their supporters.

### ***Recommendations***

It cannot be questioned that many people have done good work without making many cultural adjustments. Their love for people shows through so clearly that cultural inflexibility is overlooked by local people. When planning work in E-1 situations, however, it seems appropriate to do the following things if one wishes to maximize one's work for God:

1. Be acquainted with and take seriously the implications of cross-cultural studies. Stan Shewmaker claims that although he lived among the Tonga in Zambia for almost twenty years as a “missionary kid,” the work by Canadian anthropologist Elizabeth Colson “provided me with numerous insights into Tonga life which had never before occurred to me.”<sup>102</sup> In other words, the anthropologist was trained to surface various dimensions of the culture that often escape those who are enmeshed in it. It is poor stewardship of available information to neglect helpful studies of cultures.

2. Pay attention to psychological differences and basic assumptions about life. Mead found that Europeans and North Americans, for example, are educated differently about the nature of success and failure.<sup>103</sup> She discovered that British people and their U.S. counterparts made different assumptions about dating. Knowing and functioning within formal systems, such as etiquette

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<sup>102</sup> Stan Shewmaker, *Tonga Christianity* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1970):xiv.

<sup>103</sup> Mead, “What Makes Americans Tick?”

and social interaction, are crucial to one's full acceptance in an E-1 situation as well as in an E-3 context. Lynn Anderson found that the longer the U.S. workers stayed in Canada, the more they realized the differences between the two countries. It has become more routine than previously that missionaries in training are exposed to these needs of understanding and adjustment. These factors are usually treated in basic missiology courses.

3. Develop personal flexibility and a willingness to fit into local customs and procedures while holding inflexibly to specifically biblical behavior and thought. This is consistent with Paul's description of his own work (1 Cor. 9:19-22). Accepting as valid the general patterns in the E-1 situation will facilitate one's acceptance by people in the host culture and maximize whatever one is capable of doing for God. The gospel itself has qualities of both offense and good news, and for that one need not apologize; but one does not need to add to that offense by being personally distant from or even repulsive to local people for lack of cultural sensitivity and adjustment.

4. Help people in the host culture to think through the changes they need to make, but do so within their frame of reference. All cultures change all the time, and from a Christian point of view the gospel is always a kind of intrusion into every culture, including our own. If a cultural foreigner, even in an E-1 situation, does not function within the cultural framework of the host culture, he or she is less likely to help the people to change in those matters that are required by Scripture. Thus, when approaching E-1 situations from various angles, it is obvious that adaptation is mandatory. Theoretically, such changes should be easier than those in E-3 situations. The root cause of failure at such adjustments, however, is found in the deceiving nature of a culture which is similar to one's own.

## Chapter 16

# A British Church in Illinois

(Originally published under this title in *Gospel Advocate* 122 [April 1980]: 200.)

Let us put it this way: Suppose a group of British people move into a certain Illinois city over a period of several months. They are there either on an extended R.A.F./U.S.A.F. officers' exchange program or to help a recently installed British business. Suppose a few of those people are members of the same church and cannot find an existing congregation within easy driving range. They decide to begin meeting where they live so they can worship and perhaps reach out to a few unchurched local people.

They begin worshiping in a rented hall, using what is most familiar to them: British hymn books (having many of the same hymns one finds in U.S.A. hymnals but sung to different tunes—alas, unknown—to most Americans). The faithful worshippers drive up to the hall in imported British cars, with steering wheels on the “wrong” side of the vehicles. The order of worship is what they know best: a “president” presides over the service calling on other participants, with thirty minutes or so used in preparation for the Lord’s Supper. Literature is made available for the church and visitors who may come in, but it is all printed in Britain, using British spelling and illustrations.

The little church wants to grow. It has a message for the whole world, even for the Americans. So, it gets a preacher to come over from Britain to work with it. He preaches sermons with his British accent and expressions, using illustrations about unheard-of-Christian leaders like David King and Walter Crosssthaite. As an outreach effort, the church prepares for a “mission” (which by interpretation means “gospel meeting”), handbills for which are printed locally but with British spelling and terminology.

For variations in fellowship and association the members get together for teas and have outings during which a soccer ball is kicked around by men old enough to know better. At other times a makeshift cricket match is negotiated—all in Illinois.

Now, suppose that little group of people wants to convince local people in their town that they are a non-denominational, non-national church with a world-wide message. "We are not a British church," they say, as they make out a case that none of their beliefs are distinctively British, in nature or origin. They may very well be right, but it would be clear to a person in Illinois that something does not sound or "feel" right about the situation. Their "feeling" is understandable, because something about the church's formal systems, not its theological views, would make it difficult for a local person to feel truly "at home," or at least comfortable in that church. Many of the very things the British Christians would take for granted and not even think to discuss (social activities, "What's wrong with our American cars?" "Cricket doesn't make any sense to me," etc.) would be hindrances. Those "matters of judgment" turn out to be significant in getting New Testament Christianity accepted by local people.

***It happens:*** This procedure has been followed by scores of churches, including churches of Christ, as they have sought to evangelize abroad. The exact reverse of the above situation has happened with U. S. Christians in Britain, and they have been puzzled as to why local people would be suspicious of them. It may not have been the gospel which was rejected; more likely the packaging of the message or its accompanying luggage was the high hurdle to local people, at least among those who were disposed to take religion seriously. Literally thousands of African Independent churches have been formed, partially because of the strange way Christianity has been packaged for them.<sup>104</sup>

A member of the West Berlin congregation informed this writer that the Americans who began that church brought with them a hymnbook printed in the USA and used by German-speaking churches in North America. It was somewhat strange to the Berliners. Several years later the church changed to a hymnbook published in Germany and were "happy as larks." All hymnbooks in German are not the same!

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<sup>104</sup> See David Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Oxford University Press, 1968).

The gospel is universal in nature and appeal. Stephen Neill has pointed out that “There is no race and no religion in the world which has not yielded converts to the Christian faith,” and he claims that that is “a careful statement.”<sup>105</sup> The gospel itself can be understood universally, but the extent to which it has been tied to particular cultural expressions has evidently hindered its impact and durability in various countries. What can be done about it?

**Toward Solutions:** This very issue spawned discussion (late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century) of “indigenous churches” and the means by which they can be developed. The words “indigenous” and “indigeneity” have now largely given way to other terms like “contextualization” and “adaptation,” but the concerns are the same. The chief concerns here are with the way in which the gospel can be proclaimed so that it is understood and with the degree to which emerging churches will meaningfully intersect with local culture. The gospel is always an intrusion in any culture, of course, but many of its expressions in life are culturally varied. This writer once met a delightful elderly Moravian couple who had worked unsuccessfully with native Americans on the west coast of the USA. Among the things they did was to use a portable organ on which they accompanied the singing of hymns in German! No matter how biblically correct the message one preaches, it will be much more difficult for people to accept when it is clothed in culturally foreign dress. Even where there is reluctant initial acceptance of the message, people often tend to revert to former orientations, even though it may take a generation or two to see that effect.

While a full program for this work cannot be spelled out in a short space, the following principles are known to be involved where people succeed in planting durable churches:

1. Clearly proclaiming an unchangeable gospel by which people come to follow Jesus Christ as real disciples.
2. Developing an understanding of a local culture so that the “formal structures” of Christian life may engage meaningfully local needs and circumstances—as the early church did with Jews and Gentiles.

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<sup>105</sup> Stephen Neill, *The Christian Faith and Other Faiths: The Dialogue with Other Religions* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; InterVarsity Press, 1960): 224.

3. Enabling people to worship in their own language, using tunes and words which make sense in their context.
4. Stressing in every land those basic components of the gospel by which people *become* Christians, while giving special attention to those strands of the gospel which initially meet the pressing needs of each society. (No one emphasizes equally every aspect of New Testament teaching. None should be ultimately avoided or neglected, but some aspects are always to be stressed more than others. For example, who in North America preaches on idolatry as much as Paul did, as reflected in Acts? Who preaches regularly in the USA on “persecution” as reflected in Hebrews, 1 Peter, and Revelation?).

The academic study of ways in which to take the gospel across culture lines is called “Missiology,” but there are many good books that one may read on the subject without formally enrolling in a course. Ask a good resource person for the titles of such books or Internet links. Christian workers will do a better job of evangelizing when they are informed along these lines, and their sponsoring churches will do a better job of stewarding their work when they are suitably informed about their tasks.

It is possible to do much better than planting Dutch churches in Indonesia, American churches in Israel, and British churches in Illinois.

## Chapter 17

### **Overview: Why Churches of Christ “Stand as Good a Chance as Any and a Better Chance than Most” to do Effective Global Evangelizing**

The terminology employed in the title of this Chapter is drawn from a speech Dr. Donald McGavran gave at Abilene Christian University (Abilene, TX) several years ago. In that speech He affirmed that “you brethren in churches of Christ stand as good a chance as any and a better chance than most” to do “an effective work in global evangelizing.” He gave three reasons for his judgment, and though I did not hear the speech I verified the statements later in a conversation with him.

McGavran (1897-1991) knew churches of Christ well, both because of his own heritage and his interacting in modern times with missionaries from churches of Christ. He was born in India to missionary parents who worked for the Disciples of Christ in their more conservative days. Educated in the USA, he returned to India to work for several decades in a variety of capacities: “educator, field executive, hospital administrator, evangelist, Bible translator, church planter, and researcher.”<sup>106</sup> His experiences, observations, extensive travels, and readings were broad in the field of global Christian work.<sup>107</sup> Out of that background and his ripeness of years he made his observations about churches of Christ.

In McGavran’s perspective there were/are three reasons for his conclusions about churches of Christ. (1) *You have a message*

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<sup>106</sup> Ken Mulholland, “McGavran, Donald A.” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. by A. Scot Moreau (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000): 607

<sup>107</sup> Gary L. McIntosh, *Donald Anderson McGavran: Biography of the Twentieth Century’s Premier Missiologist* (Church Leader Insights with Nelson Searcy, 2015)



that will “wash.” Having sat in some of his classes, read a number of his books and articles, and conversed with him numerous times, I conclude that he was referring to our taking Scripture seriously and preaching a good news message about Jesus and his saving and sanctifying work for a lost humanity. In the first edition of his *Understanding Church Growth* he stated, “The fact that eighty per cent and more of the activities of missions today are organized good deeds and social action takes the attention of many younger Churches off the propagation of the Gospel.”<sup>108</sup> While he knew and appreciated the theological and practical value of engaging in compassionate service, he also knew that making known the good news, evangelizing, had to be done more directly and intentionally if people would come to faith in Jesus Christ. He applauded what he saw as the major thrust of work by churches of Christ, namely, giving priority to the communication of a good news message that was solidly biblical in content.

It is true that humans are tempted to preach to others the message that made good sense to them when they came to faith, but in doing that they may at times give a good biblical message that is not initially “good news” to the hearers. As Hoekendijk once remarked, “To proclaim to the lame that ‘the blind man can see’ is no good news, although of course, correct. It can be footnoted as correct orthodoxy, but not gospel.”<sup>109</sup> McGavran knew that one could not initially approach a Hindu with a message about “forgiveness of sins” since that would appear to take sin too lightly, and even to disrupt his worldview before he had a chance hear good news. There are equally biblical places to begin with a good news message, and devotion to the biblical message without obligation to follow a formal creed or a traditional way of going about things frees one up to look for those beginning points. That is a real strength, and part of the thrust of Chapters 1-3 of this book.

(2) McGavran further justified his judgment about churches of Christ by saying that “*You are large enough and have enough*

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<sup>108</sup> McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1970): 6.

<sup>109</sup> Tetsunaoui Yamamori and Charles R. Tabor, editors, *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* “William S. Carter Symposium on Church Growth.” Milligan College, TN. (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1975): 219.

*resources to rise up and do a significant work.*" Of course, a number of churches and denominations have financial resources to fund this or that ministry; and a number of them, like the Southern Baptists, Assemblies of God, and Seventh-day Adventists, have a sufficient number of workers to carry out global work. This writer's surmise is that McGavran was addressing the tendency of some churches to feel their minority status and conclude that their contribution to global evangelization will be necessarily small and count for little. He saw a different picture.

In the early 1970s churches of Christ (non-instrumental) ranked third among North American, non-Roman Catholic sending agents in the number of missionaries they were sending out.<sup>110</sup> Only Southern Baptists and Wycliffe Bible Translators were sending out more workers. While discussing the fact that churches of Christ were doing their work without the use of a missionary society, Ralph Winter, then professor of the History of the Christian Movement at Fuller, commented to Phil Elkins and this writer, "Yes, but you don't have a big, unwieldy missionary society tied around your neck!" Like several independent Evangelical churches, churches of Christ have followed a church-sponsored approach. That is not inferior ways of doing the work, providing those churches are well informed. (That is the big thrust of chapters 4-14 of this book.) The same goes for missionary societies. Some of the classic blunders in cross-cultural evangelizing have been promoted by missionary societies. Happily, churches of Christ in North American (and elsewhere) have at their disposal today more useful information and more valuable resource persons than ever before. McGavran was right; because of their size, available help, and personnel, churches of Christ have "as good a chance as any and a better chance than most" to do effective world evangelizing. This observation is quite apart from our indigenous churches in Latin America, South Korea, Africa, and India who are sending out workers. In his Foreword Dr. Huffard mentioned a good example of this that he saw in his recent experience in South Africa.

(3) The third reason McGavran gave for his judgment was that *"you have a strong doctrine of the church."* Over against the

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<sup>110</sup> The numbers were gathered and published by MARC organization of Monrovia, CA.

general Protestant, and especially the Evangelical, neglect of ecclesiology,<sup>111</sup> churches of Christ have historically stressed the biblical doctrine of the church. With some exceptions, the Reformation and post-Reformation churches focused chiefly on the doctrine of salvation. Calvin was one of those exceptions. Wesley wrote little about biblical ecclesiology. His focus was on salvation and sanctification, reactions against the stuffy, formalistic Anglican Church that needed reformation. By contrast, preachers and academicians in churches of Christ have written much about the nature of the church described in the New Testament,<sup>112</sup> so much so that internal critics have complained about “churchanity.” Why, then, would McGavran see its ecclesiology as a strength for churches of Christ?

In 1975 this writer heard McGavran give a guest lecture in a class at Fuller Theological Seminary’s School of World Missions, now called the School of Intercultural Studies. He rehearsed the events that proved to be seminal in his emphasis on “church growth” as an integral part of making and developing disciples worldwide. J. Waskom Pickett, Methodist Bishop who had worked long in India, asked McGavran to join him in a piece of research commissioned by John R. Mott. The task was to investigate nine different types of mission activities (medicine, agriculture, education, hard-line evangelism, and so forth) in an effort to determine which approaches seemed to be producing what appeared to be viable, sustainable churches and Christian presence.<sup>113</sup> The two men and their associates had done about half

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<sup>111</sup> Evangelical Anglican James I. Packer once referred to the “stunted” doctrine of the church held by many Evangelicals. Their heavy emphasis on individual salvation, being born again, is out of balance with emphasis on the corporate nature of the Christian faith. With liberal Protestantism, ecclesiology is part of a larger neglect of biblical teachings.

<sup>112</sup> The list of writings is long. In addition to hundreds of articles and tracts, books and sections of books stretch from Robert Milligan’s *Scheme of Redemption* (1868) to Everett Ferguson’s *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996).

<sup>113</sup> The research was first published in 1938. J. Waskom Pickett, Donald A. McGavran, G. H. Singh, *Christian Mission in Mid India: A Study of Nine Areas with Special Reference to Mass Movements* (Vadodora, Gujarat: Isha Books Publisher, 2013 reprint).

of the research when Pickett had to return to the USA for some emergency. "Now that you see what we are doing, Mac, you need to finish this research," Pickett commented. During that research McGavran reported that he became convinced that only one or two of the nine works they studied had produced anything that looked viable and potentially self-sustaining as an explicitly Christian activity. Those two were the ones that specialized in evangelizing and welding the converts into culturally appropriate churches, gathered communities of interacting believers.

As stated, McGavran had prepared himself, even to the extent of earning a PhD in education (Columbia University), to make his missions contribution in Christian education. McGavran concluded, "I became convinced I had worked twenty years in the wrong direction for what I wanted to accomplish." Missionaries are often defensive about what they have done and find it difficult to be self-critical, but McGavran was brave and honest enough to face the evidence. That experience led him to re-read missions history for insight, for confirmation or denial of his provisional conclusion. Out of that came his seminal *Bridges of God*<sup>114</sup> in which he surveyed the past use of human social groups and linkages for evangelistic purposes and then deliberately forming those converts into Christian assemblies, churches. He found strong confirmation of the conclusions he had reached in India. That was a contrast to many previous mission efforts in which converts were isolated from their culture by meeting and worshipping on mission compounds. McGavran's book proved to be a watershed in missiological thinking. Near the center of his concern was the formation of viable, culturally appropriate churches composed of people who had yielded themselves to Jesus Christ in trusting obedience. He saw that as an apostolic practice and sought to stress its relevance for twentieth-century evangelization.

It is unfortunate, in this writer's judgment, that pragmatic North American Evangelicals picked up on the "church growth" part of McGavran's emphasis and attempted to use it as a means of making their churches larger and larger while often neglecting larger theological issues. The degree to which church growth was

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<sup>114</sup> McGavran, *Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* was originally published by World Dominion (UK) in 1955 but has been reprinted several times.

a part of serious disciple-making varied from group to group. McGavran wanted it placed in a context of theologically responsible disciple-making in carrying out God's global intentions. He felt the local church to be a serious theological issue, not a pragmatic way of getting things done. Evidently he saw in churches of Christ a comparatively greater theological emphasis on the church than he found in conservative Protestantism. At any rate, he saw it as one of the three strengths of churches of Christ.

It is uncanny how missionaries from various churches follow procedures that are inconsistent with their announced theology. At times churches of Christ have faltered in this regard. That was one reason Chapters 2, 11, and 16 in this book were written several years previously.

More than most teachers and disciple-makers realize, the ecclesiology of churches of Christ is capable of worldwide expression. They do not go by a culture-bound name. Indeed, though "churches of Christ" is a biblical way of designating Jesus-followers, it has always been acknowledged that it not the only biblical way of describing serious believers in congregation. A half century ago a little book by Moody Press contained this: "Converts in *north* Brazil have been perplexed by the insistence that they must be *Southern* Baptists, but on the other hand a Japanese pastor could boast that he was not merely a Lutheran, but 'a Missouri Synod Lutheran.'" <sup>115</sup> The pattern of churches' self-governing before God without earthly headquarters, while enjoying fellowship with sister churches, seems to work all over the world.

The effort of churches to be non-denominational somehow rings true in places like India where Protestants have talked about unity for decades but without providing a viable plan for such unity. <sup>116</sup> All in all, and from a missiological perspective, at the three-quarter point of the 20<sup>th</sup> century churches of Christ in North America

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<sup>115</sup> W. H. Pape, "The Indigenous Method in Practice in Japan" in *The Indigenous Church: A Report from Many Fields* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1960): 80.

<sup>116</sup> I state this with due regard to the still provisional arrangements of the Church of South India.

are in “as good a position as any and a better position than most” to do effective global disciple-making.<sup>117</sup>

Final note: The selection of material in this book has been designed to affirm the strengths and shore up some of the weaknesses among all churches of Christ who engage in cross-cultural, global disciple-making. It is hoped that at least a few insights here and there will help church leaders and aspiring missionaries as they seek to carry out their mission for God.

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<sup>117</sup> At the publication of this present volume, over forty years after McGavran’s statement, this writer sees no reason to question his judgment about the position of churches of Christ, if they will be true to their announced theology.